

JUNE 1997



inter**Z**one

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'A Spy in Europa'

by

Alastair Reynolds

plus new stories from

Paul di Filippo

Catherine Mintz

Stephen Baxter

Eugene Byrne

and an
interview
with

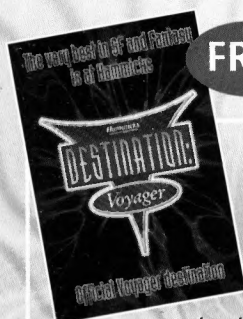
Geoffrey A. Landis



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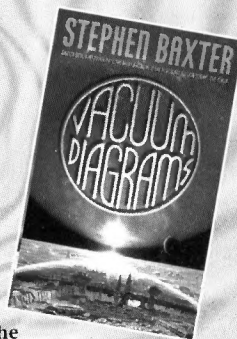
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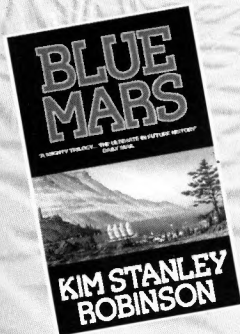


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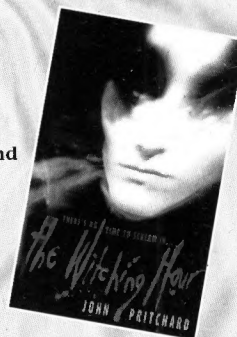
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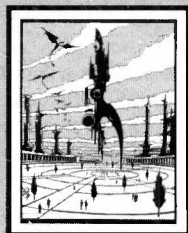
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interZone

June 1997

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science fiction & fantasy

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Dear Editors:

I was fascinated by James Lovegrove's comments about horror fiction (interview with Peter Crowther, *Interzone* 118). I remember feeling like that too. When I started writing like myself I was convinced that there was almost no good work in the field and that it was my task to reclaim it on behalf of literature. The writer I thought, and still think, showed the way was Fritz Leiber. Lovegrove exalts Stephen King. Let's hope this helps him to produce work less repetitive, derivative and dull than mine. On the evidence of *The Hope*, however, and of the portion of *Escardy Gap* sent to me so that I could encourage publishers to consider the book, his claim to have outgrown horror is premature.

Ramsey Campbell
Wallasey, Merseyside

Editor: *We have an interesting new James Lovegrove story in hand for the next issue of this magazine. It's science fiction, but...*

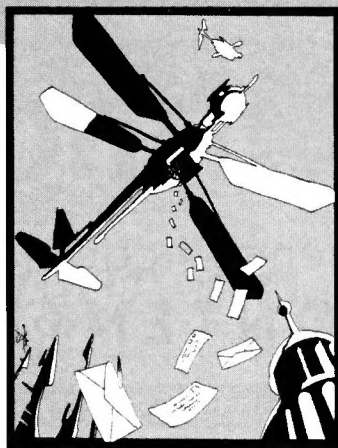
Dear Editors:

For Ghetto read Alternative! Having got a bit behind with my reading, I read *Interzones* 117 and 118 back-to-back, and made one of those links one sometimes makes between apparently unconnected items.

"Interaction" in 118 continues the ghetto/mainstream discussion which has sustained sf ever since I started reading it over 30 years ago. I wouldn't have thought any more about it, or put pen to paper, if I hadn't just read Brian Stableford's small press review in 117 ("D-I-Y Subculture"). He talks about the mass of books published, and CDs manufactured, and suggests that we will in future increasingly have to find what we want to read in the small presses.

I find this quite unremarkable, because I have always read sf because it is different, as an alternative to the mainstream. Today I read in many areas other than sf, and most of my reading comes from specialist publishers or mail-order. Most of the magazines I read are specialist too. In recent years I've been listening mostly to World Music – from a huge variety of places – and the CDs I buy are as a result almost entirely of a specialist nature. I guess I simply don't have much desire to conform, and I don't have any interest in persuading others to like what I like. Nor do I care what others think about what I like. Very few of the books I read ever get reviewed in the general press. I expect to go to my specialist sources – like *Interzone* – to find out about them.

Why do we feel the need to "conquer" or attain respect from the so-



called mainstream (which, let's face it, is just another ghetto for the Eng. Lit. mob)? The sf community is loosely held together by an interest in subject matter of a particular type, some of it branded for easy identification, while some needs a bit of searching out. Some of it is good, some is bad. Some of it gets appropriated for other purposes and is recycled (e.g. sf film material). I just stick to what I like, without attempting to define it very closely, and use magazines like *IZ* to act as my guide.

Brian J. Cox
Bosham, Chichester, W. Sussex

Dear Editors:

There are, I imagine, many ways of approaching an examination of science fiction. We have all seen it argued over, dissected, taken out of its ghetto, put back in again, kept at arms' length by people who ought to have known better, etc, etc. We have seen the advances given to some writers reach unbelievable heights. We have seen many great writers of British sf (and I am thinking of Barry Bayley) greatly reduce their output. And we have seen the incredible rise of spinoffery, which, like the present bull market, would seem to run ahead heedless of any future portent of doom. But I write this from the viewpoint of a 42-year-old, someone who cut his teeth on *New Worlds*, *Galaxy*, E. C. Tubb and J. G. Ballard – in a distant galaxy, a long, long time ago.

What is to be feared is not the ghettoization of sf or the abandonment of labelling or the floods of

Art and Non-Fiction Poll Results

Alas, we haven't managed to prepare these remaining 1996 popularity-poll results in time for this issue. With luck, they should appear in the next *Interzone*.

Editor

books which publishers believe to be sf but about which we have doubts. No. What is to be feared, and I suffer from this, is the "More of the Same, Please" mentality.

But it's only natural because we love reading sf. We have this in common with readers of other types of genre fiction. There are those who love the romance, the detective, historical novels and what have you. To generalize, I think it would be true to say that sf readers are in love with reading.

To conclude: after reading Dan Simmons's *Hyperion* I put the book down and thought, I want to read another like that – please!

Norman Finlay
(No address given)

Dear Editors:

I'd like to reply to Brian Stableford's review headed "D-I-Y Subculture" (issue 117, March 1997). Brian drew an interesting parallel between small-press book and music production in this piece. Ah, if only it were so. The music business distribution/production machine can – and frequently does – convert small music labels into thundering commercial titans with the flip of a customer's coin. What have we got in books? Having recently left Macmillan to become Electronic Publisher for the world's second largest specialist financial publisher (and therefore safe to rant in my newfound security), I'll tell you.

A system where bookshops demand up to 50% discount and happily feel free to dump unsold novels back on publishers' doorsteps due to their own lack of commercial acumen. A system increasingly dominated by large chains who won't even see you unless you're (a) paying them for their buyer's time, (b) paying a fortune to "Pratchett" a bookshelf, or (c) touting the latest Hollywood film adaption. (To "Pratchett" a bookshelf means: to leverage via commercial might, massive marketing spend and resource/author superstar concentration, the sole rights to football pitch-sized acres of prime shelf-space inside retail chains such as W. H. Smith.)

What chance does a small publisher with a real author have in such an environment? You can typeset the book on your PC. You might print the book on your John Bull print set. But try selling it to Dillons and Waterstones. See how economic it is to phone/visit each independent and then mail them two copies even where they'll buy from you! Ask Ringpull Press how economic it was for them.

Stableford highlighted the decline of reading among the young, but that's only half the equation. The other side of the coin is a stagnant

book-publishing industry practically volunteering for extermination. Both publishers and bookshops are peering dimly out of the prehistoric mist, faces being warmed by a meteor light they will never understand. Bad news for publishosaurs. The good news is reserved for tiny mammals everywhere. To any small sf/fantasy publisher now, I'd say *Web Web Web*. Fifty million users now – 200 million expected in 3 years. My own sf web site, <http://www.sf-fantasy.com>, has published dozens of new young authors and it is averaging 10,000 "readers" a month on squirt promotion. True, turning a profit from W3 Publishing is not easy (more possible than its detractors would have you believe, though). But was the Ministry of Whimsy Press set up to fund Jeff VanderMeer's retirement? Or any other author they publish? Small presses do it for love, art and obsession. Same deal for their writers. I'll see you web-side. Otherwise we really *must* do lunch in that pizza place opposite the bankruptcy court.

Stephen Hunt

Croydon, Surrey

(stephenhunt@easynet.co.uk)

Dear Editors:

Shaun Tan's cover for issue 117 was wonderful; I'm going to hang it on the wall. Storm Constantine's "The Rust Islands" was good. I like stories that manage to convey nostalgia about the future. I didn't enjoy Paul Di Filippo's story as much – not really my cup of tea. William Spencer's "The Mind Slice" was excellent – much more enjoyable. Wendy Bradley's article on *The X-Files* was spot on. Terry Dowling's "No Hearts to be Broken" is the best thing this issue. Delightful stuff. I wish I could feel the same about David Hutchinson's "The Trauma Jockey"; it has a good sf idea at its core but the plot is sordid and has no sympathetic characters to redeem it (more on this later). Brian Stableford's "Creators of SF" article on James Blish was very good (as usual).

I came home from work to find issue 118 in pieces having been savaged by the dog. Having carried out repairs (to the extent that the issue was at least readable) I was pleased to find Greg Egan's "Reasons to be Cheerful" – quite the best thing I've read since I don't know when. It's a marvellous story that builds and builds and gets better and better. I think I'll look at the world a little differently from now on, and there's no higher praise I can bestow than that.

While there are some things to admire in Dominic Green's "Every-When," there's also much to loathe. In the end I was so annoyed by it I found myself wishing the dog had completely demolished those pages and saved me the bother of wading through it. It barely qualifies as a

story at all. Ugh! I hope the other two stories you've accepted by Dominic are not in the same vein. "Reality" by Meg Turville Heitz is an OK story. The imagery of being sucked into the stereogram and ultimately seeing the world from that perspective was compelling. For a change I didn't totally agree with Wendy Bradley's opinions in "Tube Corn." I think *Dark Skies* is worthy of a bit more praise than it's getting. Conversely, *Space: Above and Beyond* is hopeless and worthy only of merciful dismissal. That's my opinion, anyway, and I'm sticking with it.

Francis Amery's "When Molly Met Elvis" struck the right level of weird – a pleasant way to pass a half hour or so. "Winged Chariot" by Ben Jeapes: interesting to compare this with "The Trauma Jockey." Both feature characters who basically get their comeuppance. In "Winged Chariot" the crimes are completely vague and indeed the main character spends most of the story carrying out good deeds. In many ways he has already redeemed himself (perhaps this is why his past crimes are never specified in detail), yet his past (future) still catches up with him. I find "Winged Chariot" much more interesting because the character is interesting and the moral issues complex. In "The Trauma Jockey" we just have "evil" getting a taste of its own medicine. Satisfying, I suppose, but comparatively one-dimensional.

The article on Chad Oliver was informative and I'm happy to see this sort of thing in the magazine. (Strange to see a history-of-sf article without Mr Stableford's name on it.) Anyway, thanks again for two very good issues, particularly for "Reasons to be Cheerful" and "No Hearts to be Broken."

Chris Butler

Farnborough, Hants.

Dear Editors:

At the risk of being thought to be trying to make *IZ* into the thinking person's *Starburst*, I feel I need to write in respect of Wendy Bradley's comments in *IZ* 118 on *Dark Skies*. Let me first say that I fully agree with the views in her column on *Space: Above and Beyond*. This enjoyable guff revealed itself to be such an article when I found myself able to pick holes in it from episode one. Like Wendy, I too wondered why the US Marine Corps would spend millions

on training these pilots, only to use them as grunts in most episodes. My personal bugbear is the misuse of the naval metaphors. I realize that Americans, with nothing worth talking about as history of their own, try to invent one by using spurious metaphors even now – but *SpAB* (nice descriptive acronym, that) takes this to new heights of absurdity. The ultimate in this was the episode where a space freighter was about to run a gauntlet of alien fighters, and some character actually said – I kid you not – "the tramp steamer's about to weigh anchor and set sail." And if the aliens have such unstable body chemistry, why don't the Marines attack them with water pistols?

But what I really wanted to talk about was *Dark Skies*. I don't accept Wendy's view that this series is as badly flawed as all that. To me, the whole thing is more reminiscent of *The Invaders*; but it remains superior to *The X-Files* for one big reason. It is a damn sight more coherent than *The X-Files*, for we have been introduced to the conspiracy from the outset. But whereas the conspiracy in *The X-Files* is run by Cigarette Man and his cohort of fat cats, in *Dark Skies* we see the opposite side of that coin – Majestic (shame that the show tips its hat in homage to Whitley Strieber, but still...), a group of misguided patriots who are doing their best to defend their country (and by extension, the world) in the only way they know how. The tension in their particular sub-plot comes from the conflict between Majestic on the one hand and Loenggaard on the other, who Majestic – in the form of Frank Bach – see as a maverick but as a useful source to have on their side, but simultaneously on the outside.

And at least with the "prawns"

Wendy is so fond of, we have a reason why the aliens are conducting horrible experiments on their abductees, instead of the unspoken sub-text in *The X-Files* that, as everyone knows what it is that aliens actually do with abductees, we await with baited breath the revelation of exactly what it is that the Grays are trying to find out by sticking medical instruments seemingly designed by Chris Foss up people's bottoms. (Perhaps the Grays don't have bottoms, which is why they are so interested in crossing interstellar space to stick things up ours. This is an unusual definition of an alien intelligence, but there you are.) Like any conspiracy theory, the plot of *Dark Skies* is, by definition, daft; but as I said, it hangs together a good deal more than *The X-Files* and will probably turn out to be the more satisfying in the long run (barring cancellation, of course). I rest my case.

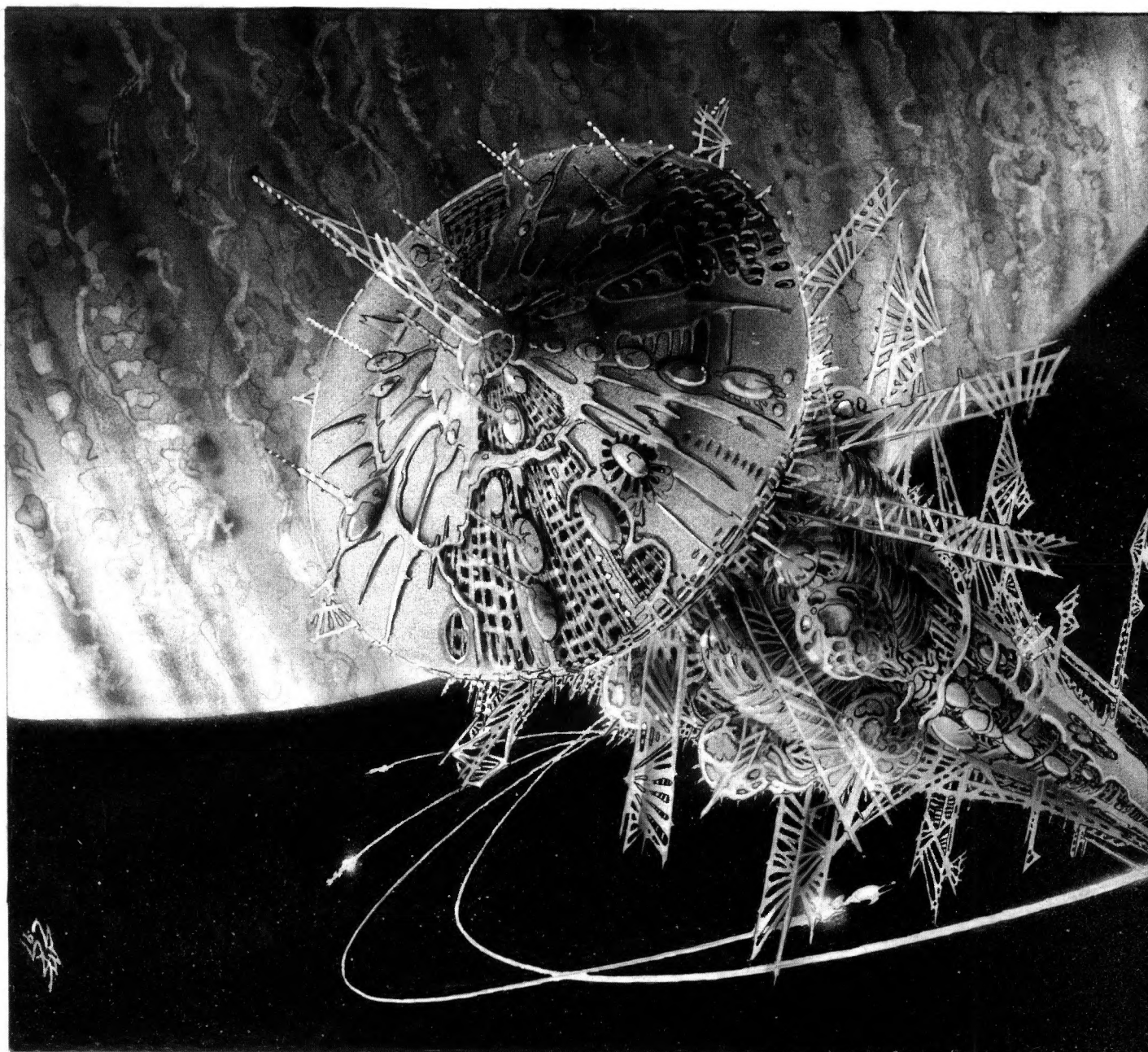
Robert Day

Fillongley, Coventry

Voyager apology

The Voyager advertisement on the inside front cover of the April issue of *Interzone* (number 118) included Stephen King in the author listing for *The Sandman Book of Dreams*. There is no story by Mr King in the book, and we apologize for any confusion caused.

HarperCollinsPublishers, London



Marius Vargovic, agent of Gilgamesh Isis, savoured an instant of free fall before the flitter's engines kicked in, slamming it away from the *Deucalion*. His pilot gunned the craft toward the moon below, quickly outrunning the other shuttles which the Martian liner had disgorged. Europa seemed to be enlarging perceptibly; a flattening arc the colour of nicotine-stained wallpaper.

"Boring, isn't it."

Vargovic turned around in his seat, languidly. "You'd rather they were shooting at us?"

"Rather they were doing *something*."

"Then you're a fool," Vargovic said, making a tent of his fingers. "There's enough armament buried in that ice to give Jupiter a second red spot. What it would do to us doesn't bear thinking about it."

"Only trying to make conversation."

"Don't bother – it's an overrated activity at the best of times."

"All right, Marius – I get the message. In fact I intercepted it, parsed it, filtered it, decrypted it with the appropriate one-time pad and wrote a fucking 200-page

report on it. Satisfied?"

"I'm never satisfied, Mishenka. It just isn't in my nature."

But Mishenka was right: Europa was an encrypted document; complexity masked by a surface of fractured and refrozen ice. Its surface grooves were like the capillaries in a vitrified eyeball; faint as the structure in a raw surveillance image. But once within the airspace boundary of the European Demarchy, traffic-management co-opted the flitter, vectoring it into a touchdown corridor. In three days Mishenka would return, but then he would disable the avionics, kissing the ice for less than ten minutes.

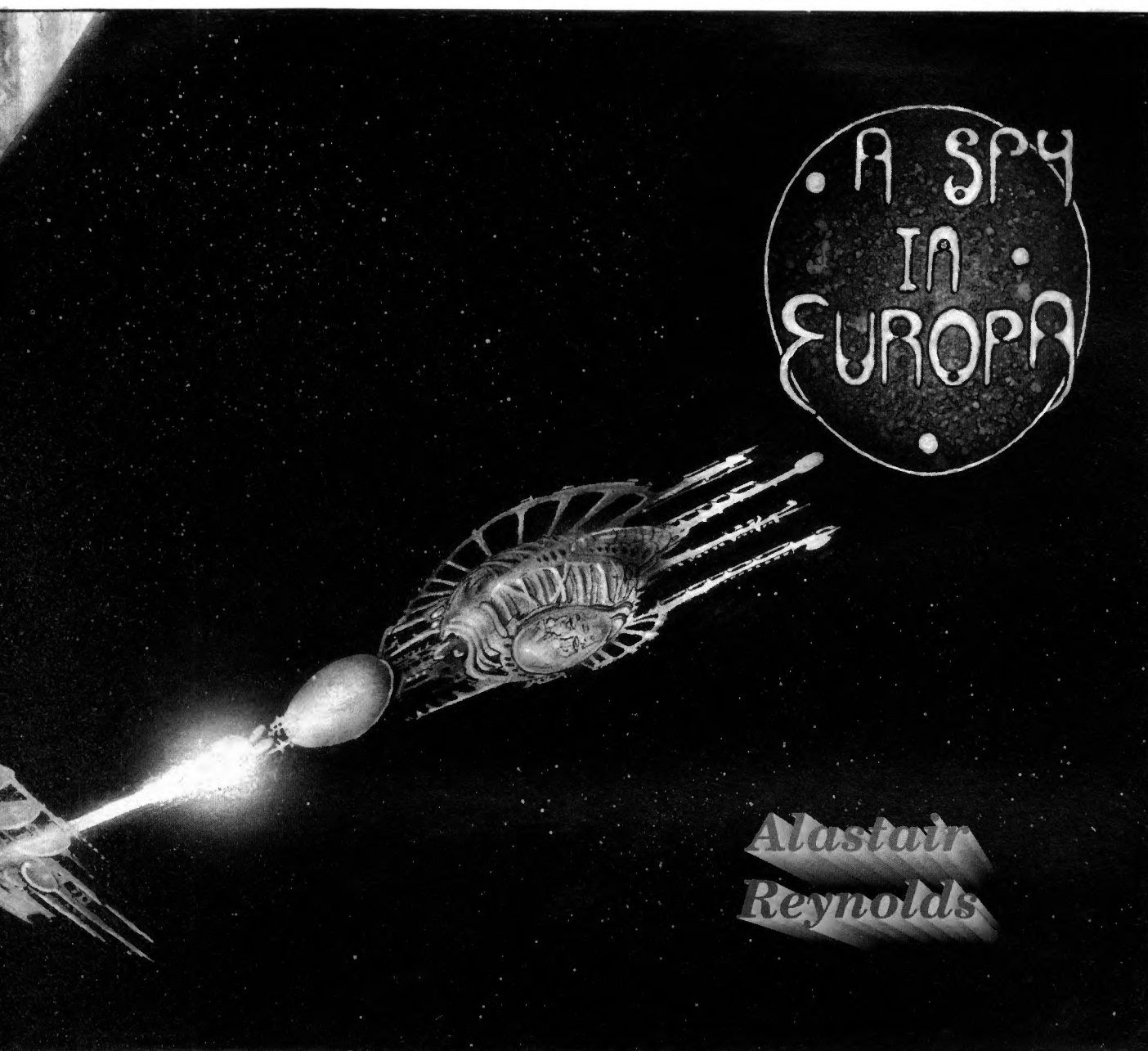
"Not too late to abort," Mishenka said, a long time later.

"Are you out of your tiny mind?"

The younger man dispensed a frosty Covert Ops smile. "We've all heard what the Demarchy do to spies, Marius."

"Is this a personal grudge or are you just psychotic?"

"I'll leave being psychotic to you, Marius – you're so much better at it."



Illustrations by SMS

Vargovic nodded. It was the first sensible thing Mishenka had said all day.

They landed an hour later. Vargovic adjusted his Martian businesswear, tuning his holographically-inwoven frock coat to project red sandstorms; lifting the collar in what he had observed from the liner's passengers was a recent Martian fad. Then he grabbed his bag – nothing incriminating there; no gadgets or weapons – and exited the flitter, stepping through the gasket of locks. A slitherwalk propelled him forward, massaging the soles of his slippers. It was a single cultured ribbon of octopus skin, stimulated to ripple by the timed firing of buried squid axons.

To get to Europa you either had to be sickeningly rich or sickeningly poor. Vargovic's cover was the former: a lie excusing the single-passenger flitter. As the slitherwalk advanced he was joined by other arrivals: business people like himself, and a sugaring of the merely wealthy. Most of them had dispensed with holographics, instead projecting entoptics beyond their personal space; machine-generated hallucinations decoded by the

implant hugging Vargovic's optic nerve. Hummingbirds and seraphim were in sickly vogue. Others were attended by autonomous perfumes which subtly altered the moods of those around them. Slightly lower down the social scale, Vargovic observed a clique of noisy tourists – antlered brats from Circum-Jove. Then there was a discontinuous jump: squalid-looking Maunder refugees, who must have accepted indenture to the Demarchy. The refugees were quickly segregated from the more affluent immigrants, who found themselves within a huge geodesic dome, resting above the ice on refrigerated stilts. The walls of the dome glittered with duty-free shops, boutiques and bars. The floor was bowl-shaped, slitherwalks and spiral stairways descending to the nadir, where a quincunx of fluted marble cylinders waited. Vargovic observed that the newly-arrived were queuing for elevators which terminated in the cylinders. He joined a line and waited.

"First time in Cadmus-Asterius?" asked the bearded man ahead of him, iridophores in his plum-coloured jacket projecting Boolean propositions from Sirikit's *Machine Ethics in the Transenlightenment*.

"First time on Europa, actually. First time Circum-Jove, you want the full story."

"Down-system?"

"Mars."

The man nodded gravely. "Hear it's tough."

"You're not kidding." And he wasn't. Since the sun had dimmed – the second Maunder minimum, repeating the behaviour which the sun had exhibited in the 17th century – the entire balance of power in the First System had altered. The economies of the inner worlds had found it hard to adjust; agriculture and power-generation handicapped, with concomitant social upheaval. But the outer planets had never had the luxury of solar energy in the first place. Now Circum-Jove was the benchmark of First System economic power, with Circum-Saturn trailing behind. Because of this, the two primary Circum-Jove superpowers – the Demarchy, which controlled Europa and Io – and Gilgamesh Isis – which controlled Ganymede, and parts of Callisto – were vying for dominance.

The man smiled keenly. "Here for anything special?"

"Surgery," Vargovic said, hoping to curtail the conversation at the earliest juncture. "Very extensive anatomical surgery."

They hadn't told him much.

"Her name is Cholok," Control had said, after Vargovic had skimmed the dossiers back in the caverns which housed the Covert Operations section of Gilgamesh Isis security, deep in Ganymede. "We recruited her ten years ago, when she was on Phobos."

"And now she's Demarchy?"

Control had nodded. "She was swept up in the brain-drain, once Maunder II began to bite. The smartest got out while they could. The Demarchy – and us, of course – snapped up the brightest."

"And also one of our sleepers." Vargovic glanced down at the portrait of the woman, striped by video lines. She looked mousey to him, with a permanent bone-deep severity of expression.

"Cheer up," Control said. "I'm asking you to contact her, not sleep with her."

"Yeah, yeah. Just tell me her background."

"Biotech." Control nodded at the dossier. "On Phobos she led one of the teams working in aquatic transform work – modifying the human form for submarine operations."

Vargovic nodded diligently. "Go on."

"Phobos wanted to sell their know-how to the Martians, before their oceans froze. Of course, the Demarchy also appreciated her talents. Cholok took her team to Cadmus-Asterius, one of their hanging cities."

"Mm." Vargovic was getting the thread now. "By which time we'd already recruited her."

"Right," Control said, "except we had no obvious use for her."

"Then why this conversation?"

Control smiled. Control always smiled when Vargovic pushed the envelope of subservience. "We're having it because our sleeper won't lie down." Then Control reached over and touched the image of Cholok, making her speak. What Vargovic was seeing was an intercept; something Gilgamesh had captured, riddled with edits and jump-cuts.

She appeared to be sending a verbal message to an old friend in Isis. She was talking rapidly from a white room; inert medical servitors behind her. Shelves displayed flasks of colour-coded medicines. A cruciform bed resembled an autopsy slab with ceramic drainage sluices.

"Cholok contacted us a month ago," Control said. "The room's part of her clinic."

"She's using phrase-embedded three," Vargovic said, listening to her speech patterns, siphoning content from otherwise normal Canasian.

"Last code we taught her."

"All right. What's her angle?"

Control chose his words – skating around the information excised from Cholok's message. "She wants to give us something," he said. "Something valuable. She's acquired it accidentally. Someone good has to smuggle it out."

"Flattery will get you everywhere, Control."

The muzak rose to a carefully timed crescendo as the elevator plunged through the final layer of ice. The view around and below was literally dizzying, and Vargovic registered exactly as much awe as befitted his Martian guise.

He knew the Demarchy's history, of course – how the hanging cities had begun as points of entry into the ocean; air-filled observation cupolas linked to the surface by narrow access shafts sunk through the kilometre-thick crustal ice. Scientists had studied the unusual smoothness of the crust, noting that its fracture patterns echoed those on Earth's ice-shelves, implying the presence of a water ocean. Europa was further from the sun than Earth, but something other than solar energy maintained the ocean's liquidity. Instead, the moon's orbit around Jupiter created stresses which flexed the moon's silicate core, tectonic heat bleeding into the ocean via hydrothermal vents.

Descending into the city was a little like entering an amphitheatre – except that there was no stage; merely an endless succession of steeply tiered lower balconies. They converged toward a light-filled infinity, seven or eight kilometres below, where the city's conic shape constricted to a point. The opposite side was half a kilometre away; levels rising like geologic strata. A wide glass tower threaded the atrium from top to bottom, aglow with smoky-green ocean and a mass of kelp-like flora, cultured by gilly swimmers. Artificial sunlamps burned in the kelp like christmas-tree lights. Above, the tower branched; peristaltic feeds reaching out to the ocean proper. Offices, shops, restaurants and residential units were stacked atop each other, or teetered into the abyss on elegant balconies, spun from lustrous sheets of bulk-chitin polymer, the Demarchy's major construction material. Gossamer bridges arched across the atrium space, dodging banners, projections and vast translucent sculptures, moulded from a silky variant of the same chitin polymer. Every visible surface was overlaid by neon, holographics and entoptics.

People were everywhere, and in every face Vargovic detected a slight *absence*; as if their minds were not entirely focused on the here and now. No wonder: all citizens had an implant which constantly interrogated them, eliciting their opinions on every aspect of Demarchy life, both within Cadmus-Asterius and beyond. Eventually, it was said, the implant's nagging

presence faded from consciousness, until the act of democratic participation became near-involuntary.

It revolted Vargovic as much as it intrigued him.

"Obviously," Control said, with judicial deliberation. "What Cholok has to offer isn't merely a nugget – or she'd have given it via PE3."

Vargovic leaned forward. "She hasn't told you?"

"Only that it could endanger the hanging cities."

"You trust her?"

Vargovic felt one of Control's momentary indiscretions coming on. "She may have been sleeping, but she hasn't been completely valueless. There were defections she assisted in... like the Maunciple job – remember that?"

"If you're calling that a success perhaps it's time I defected."

"Actually, it was Cholok's information which persuaded us to get Maunciple out via the ocean rather the front door. If Demarchy security had reached Maunciple alive they'd have learnt ten years of tradecraft."

"Whereas instead Maunciple got a harpoon in his back."

"So the operation had its flaws." Control shrugged. "But if you're thinking all this points to Cholok having been compromised... Naturally, the thought entered our heads. But if Maunciple had acted otherwise it would have been worse." Control folded his arms. "And of course, he might have made it, in which case even you'd have to admit Cholok's safe."

"Until proven otherwise."

Control brightened. "So you'll do it?"

"Like I have a choice."

"There's always a choice, Vargovic."

Yes, Vargovic thought. There was always a choice... between doing what ever Gilgamesh Isis asked of him... and being deprogrammed, cyborgized and sent to work in the sulphur projects around the slopes of Ra Patera. It just wasn't a particularly good one.

"One other thing..."

"Yes?"

"When I've got whatever Cholok has..."

Control half-smiled, the two of them sharing a private joke which did not need illumination. "I'm sure the usual will suffice."

The elevator slowed into immigration.

Demarchy guards hefted big guns, but no one took any interest in him. His story about coming from Mars was accepted; he was subjected to only the usual spectrum of invasive procedures: neural and genetic patterns scanned for pathologies, body bathed in eight forms of exotic radiation. The final formality consisted of drinking a thimble of chocolate. The beverage consisted of billions of medichines which infiltrated his body, searching for concealed drugs, weapons and illegal biomodifications. He knew that they would find nothing, but was relieved when they reached his bladder and requested to be urinated back into the Demarchy.

The entire procedure lasted six minutes. Outside, Vargovic followed a slitherwalk to the city zoo, and then barged through crowds of schoolchildren until he had arrived at the aquarium where Cholok was meant to meet him. The exhibits were devoted to European biota, most of which depended on the ecological niches of the hydrothermal vents, carefully reproduced here. There was nothing very exciting to look at, since most European predators looked marginally less fierce than hatstands or lampshades. The commonest were called *ventlings*; large and structurally simple animals whose metabolisms hinged on symbiosis. They were pulpy, funnelled bags planted on a tripod of orange stilts, moving with such torpor that Vargovic almost nodded off before Cholok arrived at his side.

She wore an olive-green coat and tight emerald trousers, projecting a haze of medicinal entoptics. Her clenched jaw accentuated the dourness he had gleaned from the intercept.

They kissed.

"Good to see you Marius. It's been – what?"

"Nine years, thereabouts."

"How's Phobos these days?"

"Still orbiting Mars." He deployed a smile. "Still a dive."

"You haven't changed."

"Nor you."

At a loss for words, Vargovic found his gaze returning to the informational read-out accompanying the ventling exhibit. Only half attentively, he read that the ventlings, motile in their juvenile phase, gradually became sessile in adulthood, stilts thickening with deposited sulphur until they were rooted to the ground like stalagmites. When they died, their soft bod-

ies dispersed into the ocean, but the tripods remained; eerily regular clusters of orange spines concentrated around active vents.

"Nervous, Marius?"

"In your hands? Not likely."

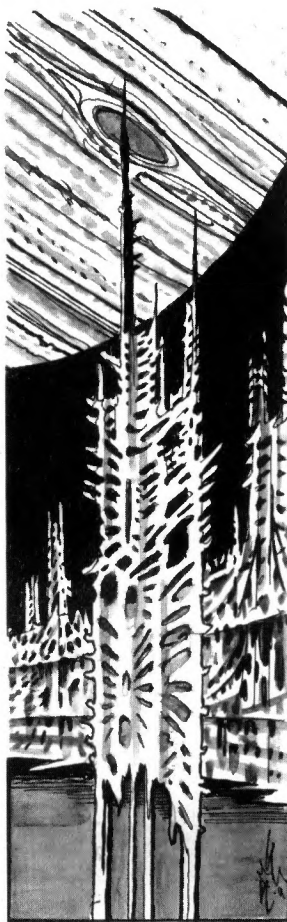
"That's the spirit."

They bought two mugs of mocha from a nearby servitor, then returned to the ventling display, making what seemed like small-talk. During indoctrination Cholok had been taught phrase-embedded three. The code allowed the insertion of secondary information into a primary conversation, by careful deployment of word-order, hesitation and sentence structure.

"What have you got?" Vargovic asked.

"A sample," Cholok answered, one of the easy, pre-set words which did not need to be laboriously conveyed. But what followed took nearly five minutes to put over, freighted via a series of rambling reminiscences of the Phobos years. "A small shard of hyperdiamond."

Vargovic nodded. He knew what hyperdiamond was: a topologically complex interweave of tubular fullerene; structurally similar to cellulose or bulk chitin but thousands of times stronger; its rigidity artificially maintained by some piezo-electric trick which Gilgamesh



lacked.

"Interesting," Vargovic said. "But unfortunately not interesting enough."

She ordered another mocha and downed it replying. "Use your imagination. Only the Demarchy knows how to synthesize it."

"It's also useless as a weapon."

"Depends. There's an application you should know about."

"What?"

"Keeping this city afloat – and I'm not talking about economic solvency. Do you know about Buckminster Fuller? He lived about 400 years ago; believed absolute democracy could be achieved through technological means."

"The fool."

"Maybe. But Fuller also invented the geodesic lattice which determines the structure of the buckyball; the closed allotrope of tubular fullerene. The city owes him on two counts."

"Save the lecture. How does the hyperdiamond come into it?"

"Flotation bubbles," she said. "Around the outside of the city. Each one is a hundred-metre wide sphere of hyperdiamond, holding vacuum. A hundred-metre wide molecule, in fact, since each sphere is composed of one endless strand of tubular fullerene. Think of that, Marius: a molecule you could park a ship inside."

While he absorbed that, another part of his mind continued to read the ventling caption; how their biochemistry had many similarities with the gutless tube worms which lived around Earth's ocean vents. The ventlings drank hydrogen sulphide through their funnels, circulating via a modified form of haemoglobin, passing through a bacteria-saturated organ in the lower part of their bags. The bacteria split and oxidized the hydrogen sulphide, manufacturing a molecule similar to glucose. The glucose-analogue nourished the ventling, enabling it to keep living and occasionally make slow perambulations to other parts of the vent, or even to swim between vents, until the adult phase rooted it to the ground. Vargovic read this, and then read it again, because he had just remembered something; a puzzling intercept passed to him from cryptanalysis several months earlier; something about Demarchy plans to incorporate ventling biochemistry into a larger animal. For a moment he was tempted to ask Cholok about it directly, but he decided to force the subject from his mind until a more suitable time.

"Any other propaganda to share with me?"

"There are 200 of these spheres. They inflate and deflate like bladders, maintaining C-A's equilibrium. I'm not sure how the deflation happens, except that it's something to do with changing the piezo-electric current in the tubes."

"I still don't see why Gilgamesh needs it."

"Think. If you can get a sample of this to Ganymede, they might be able to find a way of attacking it. All you'd need would be a molecular agent capable of opening the gaps between the fullerene strands so that a molecule of water could squeeze through, or something which impedes the piezo-electric force."

Absently Vargovic watched a squidlike predator nibble a chunk from the bag of a ventling. The squid blood ran thick with two forms of haemoglobin; one oxygen-

bearing, one tuned for hydrogen sulphide. They used glycoproteins to keep their blood flowing and switched metabolisms as they swam from oxygen-dominated to sulphide-dominated water.

He snapped his attention back to Cholok. "I can't believe I came all this way for... what? Carbon?" He shook his head, slotting the gesture into the primary narrative of their conversation. "How did you obtain this?"

"An accident, with a gilly."

"Go on."

"An explosion near one of the bubbles. I was the surgeon assigned to the gilly; had to remove a lot of hyperdiamond from him. It wasn't hard to save a few splinters."

"Forward thinking of you."

"Hard part was persuading Gilgamesh to send you. Especially after Maunciple..."

"Don't lose any sleep over him," Vargovic said, consulting his coffee. "He was a fat bastard who couldn't swim fast enough."

The surgery took place the next day. Vargovic woke with his mouth furnace-dry.

He felt – odd. They had warned him of this. He had even interviewed subjects who had undergone similar procedures in Gilgamesh's experimental labs. They told him he would feel fragile, as if his head was no longer adequately coupled to his body. The periodic flushes of cold around his neck only served to increase that feeling.

"You can speak," Cholok said, looming over him in surgeon's whites. "But the cardiovascular modifications – and the amount of reworking we've done to your laryngeal area – will make your voice sound a little strange. Some of the gilled are really only comfortable talking to their own kind."

He held a hand before his eyes, examining the translucent webbing which now spanned his fingers. There was a dark patch in the pale tissue of his palm: Cholok's embedded sample. The other hand held another.

"It worked, didn't it?" His voice sounded squeaky. "I can breathe water."

"And air," Cholok said. "Though what you'll now find is that really strenuous exercise only feels natural when you're submerged."

"Can I move?"

"Of course," she said. "Try standing up. You're stronger than you feel."

He did as she suggested, using the moment to assess his surroundings. A neural monitor clamped his crown. He was naked, in a brightly-lit revival room; one glass-walled side facing the exterior ocean. It was from here that Cholok had first contacted Gilgamesh.

"This place is secure, isn't it?"

"Secure?" she said, as if it was obscene. "Yes, I suppose so."

"Then tell me about the Denizens."

"What?"

"Demarchy code word. Cryptanalysis intercepted it recently – supposedly something about an experiment in radical biomodification. I was reminded of it in the aquarium." Vargovic fingered the gills in his neck. "Something that would make this look like cosmetic surgery. We heard the Demarchy had tailored the sul-

phur-based metabolism of the ventlings for human use.”

She whistled. “That would be quite a trick.”

“Useful, though – especially if you wanted a workforce who could tolerate the anoxic environments around the vents, where the Demarchy happens to have certain mineralogical interests.”

“Maybe.” Cholok paused. “But the changes required would be beyond surgery. You’d have to script them in at the developmental level. And even then... I’m not sure what you’d end up with would necessarily be human any more.” It was as if she shivered, though Vargovic was the one who felt cold, still standing naked beside the revival table. “All I can say is, if it happened, no one told me.”

“I thought I’d ask, that’s all.”

“Good.” She brandished a white medical scanner. “Now can I run a few more tests? We have to follow procedure.”

Cholok was right: quite apart from the fact that Vargovic’s operation was completely real – and therefore susceptible to complications which had to be looked for and monitored – any deviation from normal practise was undesirable.

After the first hour or so, the real strangeness of his transformation hit home. He had been blithely unaffected by it until then, but when he saw himself in a full-body mirror, in the corner of Cholok’s revival room, he knew that there was no going back.

Not easily, anyway. The Gilgamesh surgeons had promised him they could undo the work – but he didn’t believe them. After all, the Demarchy was ahead of Ganymede in the biosciences, and even Cholok had told him reversals were tricky. He’d accepted the mission in any case: the pay tantalizing; the prospect of the sulphur projects rather less.

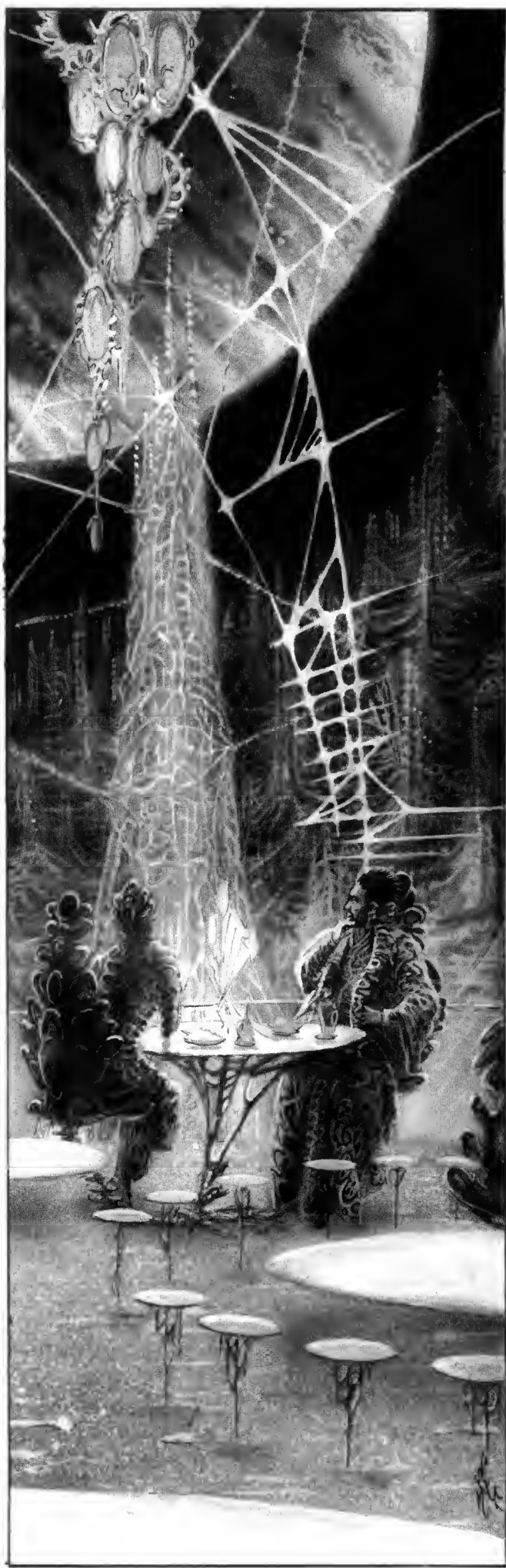
Cholok spent most of the day with him, only breaking off to talk to other clients or confer with her team. Breathing exercises occupied most of that time: prolonged periods spent underwater, nulling the brain’s drowning response. Unpleasant, but Vargovic had done worse things in training. They practised fully-submerged swimming, using his lungs to regulate buoyancy, followed by instruction about keeping his gill-openings – what Cholok called his *opercula* – clean, which meant ensuring the health of the colonies of commensal bacteria which thrived in the openings and crawled over the fine secondary flaps of his *lamellae*. He’d read the brochure: what she’d done was to surgically sculpt his anatomy toward a state somewhere between human and air-breathing fish: incorporating biochemical lessons from lungfish and walking-catfish. Fish breathed water through their mouths and returned it to the sea via their gills, but it was the gills in Vargovic’s neck which served the function of a mouth. His true gills were below his thoracic cavity; crescent-shaped gashes below his ribs.

“Compared to your body size,” she said, “these gill-openings are never going to give you the respiratory efficiency you’d have if you went in for more dramatic changes...”

“Like a Denizen?”

“I told you, I don’t know anything.”

“It doesn’t matter.” He flattened the gill-flaps down, watching – only slightly nauseated – as they puckered



with each exhalation. "Are we finished?"

"Just some final bloodwork," she said. "To make sure everything's still working. Then you can go and swim with the fishes."

While she was busy at one of her consoles, surrounded by false-colour entoptics of his gullet – he asked her: "Do you have the weapon?"

Cholok nodded absently and opened a drawer, fishing out a hand-held medical laser. "Not much," she said. "I disabled the yield-suppressor, but you'd have to aim it at someone's eyes to do much damage."

Vargovic hefted the laser, scrutinizing the controls in its contoured haft. Then he grabbed Cholok's head and twisted her around, dousing her face with the laser's actinic-blue beam. There were two consecutive popping sounds as her eyeballs evaporated.

"What, like that?"

Conventional scalpels did the rest.

He rinsed the blood, dressed and left the medical centre alone, travelling kilometres down-city, to where Cadmus-Asterius narrowed to a point. Even though there were many gillies moving freely through the city – they were volunteers, by and large, with full Demarchy rights – he did not linger in public for long. Within a few minutes he was safe within a warren of collagen-walled service tunnels, frequented only by technicians, servitors or other gill-workers. The late Cholok had been right; breathing air was harder now; it felt too thin.

"Demarchy security advisory," said a bleak machine voice emanating from the wall. "A murder has occurred in the medical sector. The suspect may be an armed gill-worker. Approach with extreme caution."

They'd found Cholok. Risky, killing her. But Gilgamesh preferred to burn its bridges, removing the possibility of any sleeper turning traitor after they had fulfilled their usefulness. In the future, Vargovic mulled, they might be better using a toxin, rather than the immediate kill. He made a mental note to insert this in his report.

He entered the final tunnel, not far from the waterlock which had been his destination. At the tunnel's far end a technician sat on a crate, listening with a stethoscope to something going on behind an access panel. For a moment Vargovic considered passing the man, hoping he was engrossed in his work. He began to approach him, padding on bare webbed feet, which made less noise than the shoes he had just removed. Then the man nodded to himself, uncoupled from the listening post and slammed the hatch. Grabbing his crate, he stood and made eye contact with Vargovic.

"You're not meant to be here," he said. Then offered, almost plaintively: "Can I help you? You've just had surgery, haven't you? I always know the ones like you: always a little red around the gills."

Vargovic drew his collar higher, then relented because that made it harder to breathe. "Stay where you are," he said. "Put down the crate and freeze."

"Christ, it was you, wasn't it – that advisory?" the man said.

Vargovic raised the laser. Blinded, the man blundered into the wall, dropping the crate. He made a pitiful moan. Vargovic crept closer, the man stumbling into the scalpel. Not the cleanest of killings, but that hardly mattered.

Vargovic was sure the Demarchy would shortly seal off access to the ocean – especially when his last murder came to light. For now, however, the locks were accessible. He moved into the air-filled chamber, his lungs now aflame for water. High-pressure jets filled the room, and he quickly transitioned to water-breathing, feeling his thoughts clarify. The secondary door clammed open, revealing ocean. He was kilometres below the ice, and the water here was both chillingly cold and under crushing pressure – but it felt normal; pressure and cold registering only as abstract qualities of the environment. His blood was inoculated with glycoproteins now; molecules which would lower its freezing point below that of water.

The late Cholok had done well.

Vargovic was about to leave the city when a second gill-worker appeared in the doorway, returning to the city after completing a shift. He killed her efficiently, and she bequeathed him a thermally-inwoven wetsuit, for working in the coldest parts of the ocean. The wetsuit had octopus ancestry, and when it slithered onto him it left apertures for his gill-openings. She had been wearing goggles which had infrared and sonar capability, and carried a hand-held tug. The thing resembled the still-beating heart of a vivisected animal, its translucent components nobbed with dark veins and ganglia. But it was easy to use: Vargovic set its pump to maximum thrust and powered away from the lower levels of C-A.

Even in the relatively uncontaminated water of the European ocean, visibility was low; he would not have been able to see anything were the city not abundantly illuminated on all its levels. Even so, he could see no more than half a kilometre upwards; the higher parts of C-A lost in golden haze and then deepening darkness. Although its symmetry was upset by protrusions and accretions, the city's basic conic form was evident, tapering at the narrowest point to an inlet mouth which ingested ocean. The cone was surrounded by a haze of flotation bubbles, black as caviar. He remembered the chips of hyperdiamond in his hands. If Cholok was right, Vargovic's people might find a way to make it water-permeable; opening the fullerene weave sufficiently so that the spheres' buoyant properties would be destroyed. The necessary agent could be introduced into the ocean by ice-penetrating missiles. Some time later – Vargovic was uninterested in the details – the Demarchy cities would begin to groan under their own weight. If the weapon worked sufficiently quickly, there might not even be time to act against it. The cities would fall from the ice, sinking down through the black kilometres of ocean below them.

He swam on.

Near C-A, the rocky interior of Europa climbed upwards to meet him. He had travelled three or four kilometres north, and was comparing the visible topography – lit by service lights installed by Demarchy gill-workers – with his own mental maps of the area. Eventually he found an outcropping of silicate rock. Beneath the overhang was a narrow ledge, on which a dozen or so small boulders had fallen. One was redder than the others. Vargovic anchored himself to the ledge and hefted the red rock, the warmth of his fingertips

activating its latent biocircuitry. A screen appeared in the rock, filling with the face of Mishenka.

"I'm on time," Vargovic said, his own voice sounding even less recognizable through the distorting medium of the water. "I presume you're ready?"

"Problem," Mishenka said. "Big fucking problem." "What?"

"Extraction site's compromised." Mishenka – or rather the simulation of Mishenka which was running in the rock – anticipated Vargovic's next question: "A few hours ago the Demarchy sent a surface team out onto the ice, ostensibly to repair a transponder. But the spot they're covering is right where we planned to pull you out." He paused. "You did – uh – kill Cholok, didn't you? I mean you didn't just grievously injure her?"

"You're talking to a professional."

The rock did a creditable impression of Mishenka looking pained. "Then the Demarchy got to her."

Vargovic wave his hand in front of the rock. "I got what I came for, didn't I?"

"You got something."

"If it isn't what Cholok said it was, then she's accomplished nothing except get herself dead."

"Even so..." Mishenka appeared to entertain a thought briefly, before discarding it. "Listen, we always had a backup extraction point, Vargovic. You'd better get your ass there." He grinned. "Hope you can swim faster than Maunciple."

It was 30 kilometres south.

He passed a few gill-workers on the way, but they ignored him and once he was more than five kilometres from C-A there was increasingly less evidence of human presence. There was a head-up display in the goggles. Vargovic experimented with the readout modes before calling up a map of the whole area. It showed his location, and also three dots which were following him from C-A.

He was being tailed by Demarchy security.

They were at least three kilometres behind him now, but they were perceptibly narrowing the distance. With a cold feeling gripping his gut, it occurred to Vargovic that there was no way he could make it to the extraction point before the Demarchy caught him.

Ahead, he noticed a thermal hot-spot; heat bubbling up from the relatively shallow level of the rock floor. The security operatives were probably tracking him via the gill-worker's appropriated equipment. But once he was near the vent he could ditch it: the water was warmer there; he wouldn't need the suit, and the heat, light and associated turbulence would confuse any other tracking system. He could lie low behind a convenient rock, stalk them while they were preoccupied with the homing signal.

It struck Vargovic as a good plan.

He made the distance to the vent quickly, feeling the water warm around him, noticing how the taste of it changed; turning brackish. The vent was a fiery red fountain surrounded by bacteria-crusted rocks and the colourless European equivalent of coral. Ventlings were everywhere; their pulpy bags shifting as the currents altered. The smallest were motile, ambling on their stilts like animated bagpipes, navigating around the triadic stumps of their dead relatives.

Vargovic ensconced himself in a cave, after placing the



gill-worker equipment near another cave on the far side of the vent, hoping that the security operatives would look there first. While they did so, he would be able to kill at least one of them; maybe two. Once he had their weapons, taking care of the third would be a formality. Something nudged him from behind.

What Vargovic saw when he turned around was something too repulsive even for a nightmare. It was so wrong that for a faltering moment he could not quite assimilate what it was he was looking at, as if the thing was a three-dimensional perception test; a shape which refused to stabilize in his head. The reason he could not hold it still was because part of him refused to believe that this thing had any connection with humanity. But the residual traces of human ancestry were too obvious to ignore.

Vargovic knew – beyond any reasonable doubt – that what he was seeing was a Denizen. Others loomed from the cave depths. They were five more of them; all roughly similar; all aglow with faint bioluminescence, all regarding him with darkly intelligent eyes. Vargovic had seen pictures of mermaids in books when he was a child; what he was looking at now were macabre corruptions of those innocent illustrations. These things were the same fusions of human and fish as in those pictures – but every detail had been twisted toward ugliness, and the true horror of it was that the fusion was total; it was not simply that a human torso had been grafted to a fish's tail, but that the splice had been made – it was obvious – at the genetic level, so that in every aspect of the creature there was something simultaneously and grotesquely piscine. The face was the worst; bisected by a lipless down-curved slit of a mouth, almost sharklike. There was no nose, not even a pair of nostrils; just an acreage of flat, sallow fish-flesh. The eyes were forward-facing; all expression compacted into their dark depth. The creature had touched him with one of its arms, which terminated in an obscenely human hand. And then – to compound the horror – it spoke, its voice perfectly clear and calm, despite the water.

"We've been expecting you, Vargovic."

The others behind murmured, echoing the sentiment. "What?"

"So glad you were able to complete your mission."

Vargovic began to get a grip, shakily. He reached up and dislodged the Denizen's hand from his shoulder. "You aren't why I'm here," he said, forcing authority into his voice, drawing on every last drop of Gilgamesh training to suppress his nerves. "I wanted to know about you... that was all..."

"No," the lead Denizen said, opening its mouth to expose an alarming array of teeth. "You misunderstand. Coming here was always your mission. You have brought us something we want very much. That was always your purpose."

"Brought you something?" His mind was reeling now.

"Concealed within you." The Denizen nodded; a human gesture which only served to magnify the horror of what it was. "The means by which we will strike at the Demarchy; the means by which we will take the ocean."

He thought of the chips in his hands. "I think I understand," he said slowly. "It was always intended for you, is that what you mean?"

"Always."

Then he'd been lied to by his superiors – or they had at least drastically simplified the matter. He filled in the gaps himself, making the necessary mental leaps: evidently Gilgamesh was already in contact with the Denizens – bizarre as it seemed – and the chips of hyperdiamond were meant for the Denizens, not his own people. Presumably – although he couldn't begin to guess at how this might be possible – the Denizens had the means to examine the shards and fabricate the agent which would unravel the hyperdiamond weave. They'd be acting for Gilgamesh, saving it the bother of actually dirtying its hands in the attack. He could see why this might appeal to Control. But if that was the case... why had Gilgamesh ever faked ignorance about the Denizens?

It made no sense. But on the other hand, he could not concoct a better theory to replace it.

"I have what you want," he said, after due consideration. "Cholok said removing it would be simple."

"Cholok can always be relied upon," the Denizen said.

"You knew – know – her, then?"

"She made us what we are today."

"You hate her, then?"

"No; we love her." The Denizen flashed its shark-like smile again, and it seemed to Vargovic that as its emotional state changed, so did the coloration of its bioluminescence. It was scarlet now; no longer the blue-green hue it had displayed upon its first appearance. "She took the abomination that we were and made us something better. We were in pain, once. Always pain. But Cholok took it away, made us strong. For that they punished her, and us."

"If you hate the Demarchy," Vargovic said, "why have you waited until now before attacking it?"

"Because we can't leave," one of the other Denizens said; the tone of its voice betraying femininity. "The Demarchy hated what Cholok had done to us. She brought our humanity to the fore; made it impossible to treat us as animals. We thought they would kill us, rather than risk our existence becoming known to the rest of Circum-Jove. Instead, they banished us here."

"They thought we might come in handy," said another of the lurking creatures.

Just then, another Denizen entered the cave, having swum in from the sea.

"Demarchy agents have followed him," it said, its coloration blood red, tinged with orange, pulsing vividly. "They'll be here in a minute."

"You'll have to protect me," Vargovic said.

"Of course," the lead Denizen said. "You're our saviour."

Vargovic nodded vigorously, no longer convinced that he could handle the three operatives on his own. Ever since he had arrived in the cave he had felt his energy dwindling, as if he was succumbing to slow poisoning. A thought tugged at the back of his mind, and for a moment he almost paid attention to it; almost considered seriously the possibility that he was being poisoned. But what was going on beyond the cave was too distracting. He watched the three Demarchy agents approach, driven forward by the tugs which they held in front of them. Each agent carried a slender harpoon gun, tipped with a vicious barb.

They didn't stand a chance.

The Denizens moved too quickly, lancing out from the

shadows, cutting through the water. The creatures moved faster than the Demarchy agents, even though they only had their own muscles and anatomy to propel them. But it was more than enough. They had no weapons, either – not even harpoons. But sharpened rocks more than sufficed – that and their teeth.

Vargovic was impressed by their teeth.

Afterwards, the Denizens returned to the cave to join their cousins. They moved more sluggishly now; as if the fury of the fight had drained them. For a few moments they were silent, and their bioluminescence curiously subdued. Slowly, though, Vargovic watched their colour return.

"It was better that they not kill you," the leader said.

"Damn right," Vargovic said. "They wouldn't just have killed me, you know." He opened his fists, exposing his palms. "They'd have made sure you never got this."

The Denizens – all of them – looked momentarily toward his open hands, as if there ought to have been something there. "I'm not sure you understand," the leader said, eventually.

"Understand what?"

"The nature of your mission."

Fighting his fatigue – it was a black slick lapping at his consciousness – Vargovic said: "I understand perfectly well. I have the samples of hyperdiamond, in my hands..."

"That isn't what we want."

He didn't like this, not at all. It was the way the Denizens were slowly creeping closer to him; sidling round him to obstruct his exit from the cave.

"What then?"

"You asked why we haven't attacked them before," the leader said, with frightening charm. "The answer's simple. We can't leave the vent."

"You can't?"

"Our haemoglobin. It's not like yours."

Again that awful sharklike smile – and now he was well aware of what those teeth could do, given the right circumstances. "It was tailored to allow us to work here."

"Copied from the ventlings?"

"Adapted, yes. Later it became the means of imprisoning us. The DNA in our bone marrow was manipulated to limit the production of normal haemoglobin; a simple matter of suppressing a few beta-globin genes while retaining the variants which code for ventling haemoglobin. Hydrogen sulphide is poisonous to you, Vargovic. You probably already feel weak. But we can't survive without it. Oxygen kills us."

"You leave the vent..."

"We die, within a few hours. There's more, as well. The water's hot here; so hot that we don't need the glycoproteins. We have the genetic instructions to synthesize them, but they've also been turned off. But without the glycoproteins we can't swim into colder water. Our blood freezes."

Now he was surrounded by them; looming aquatic devils, flushed a florid shade of crimson. And they were

coming closer.

"But what do you expect me to do about it?"

"You don't have to do anything, Vargovic." The leader opened its chasmic jaw wide, as if tasting the water. It was a miracle an organ like that was capable of speech in the first place...

"I don't?"

"No." And with that the leader reached out and seized him, while at the same time he was pinned from behind by another of the creatures. "It was Cholok's doing," the leader continued. "Her final gift to us. Maunciple was her first attempt at getting it to us – but Maunciple never made it."

"He was too fat."

"All the defectors failed – they just didn't have the stamina to make it this far from the city. That was why Cholok recruited you – an outsider."

"Cholok recruited me?"

"She knew you'd kill her – you have, of course – but that didn't stop her. Her life mattered less than what she was about to give us. It was Cholok who tipped off the Demarchy about your primary extraction site, forcing you to come to us."

He struggled, but it was pointless. All he could manage was a feeble, "I don't understand..."

"No," the Denizen said. "Perhaps we never expected you to. If you had understood, you might have been less than willing to follow Cholok's plan."

"Cholok was never working for us?"

"Once, maybe. But her last clients were us."

"And now?"

"We take your blood, Vargovic." Their grip on him tightened. He used his last draining reserves of strength to try and work loose, but it was futile.

"My blood?"

"Cholok put something in it. A retrovirus – a very hardy one, capable of surviving in your body. It reactivates the genes which

were suppressed by the Demarchy. Suddenly, we'll be able to make oxygen-carrying haemoglobin. Our blood will fill up with glycoproteins. It's no great trick: all the cellular machinery for making those molecules is already present; it just needs to be unshackled."

"Then you need... what? A sample of my blood?"

"No," the Denizen said, with genuine regret. "Rather more than a sample, I'm afraid. Rather a lot more."

And then – with magisterial slowness – the creature bit into his arm, and as his blood spilled out, the Denizen drank. For a moment the others waited – but then they too came forward, and bit, and joined in the feeding frenzy.

All around Vargovic, the water was turning red.



Alastair Reynolds's previous stories for this magazine were "Nunivak Snowflakes" (issue 36), "Dilation Sleep" (issue 39), "Enola" (issue 54), "Byrd Land Six" (issue 96) and "Spirey and the Queen" (issue 108). A busy professional scientist, with a PhD in astronomy, he comes from Wales but lives in the Netherlands.

The Cobain Sweater

Paul Di Filippo

This time I'm really gonna do it.

I'm alone in the trailer. School was cancelled cuz of boiler trouble, and Mom's at work at the diner for the breakfast-to-lunch shift, praying the bald tyres on our '85 Civic will last another day. (If the tips from the truckers and lumbermen at The Fried Owl are decent, she said, maybe we can afford to buy a couple of retreads this week.) I don't have any friends to hang with – they're all jerky granolas and jocks and geeks in this hick town we had to move to, Butthole, Washington, population ten million trees and maybe an equal number of morons. I got no money or car to make going to the stripmall in Vantage a possibility. Not even my licence, if you get right down to it. I don't like to read, I've watched every one of the five videos we own a hundred times (*Pocahontas*, *Risky Business*, *Airplane!*, *Scarface* and *Desperately Seeking Susan*), the TV only gets one station, and I've worn the fire-button off the Sega. My face is this blotchy map of zits that makes the maps of Bosnia you see on Tom Brokaw look regular as a checkerboard. Every kid within miles hates me, I've got no girlfriend and never will have one, and the best and biggest curse of my whole miserable, stinking life is my name, the name that was mostly the choice of my moron dead father who I never knew or could ever imagine wanting to know and who was trying to brown-nose some rich old uncle who never left us a dime by saddling his kid with the lousiest name in the whole universe.

Junius. Junius Weatherall. And of course you know what all the kids call me.

June. That's when they're being kind. Otherwise it's Junie. Or even Junie-Moonie.

Can you ever, ever, ever in your life imagine getting some girl to take you seriously or romantically when you're weighed down with a name like June? There you are on a date, things are getting hot, and what does she say? "Kiss me – June!" Yeah, right. In your dreams.

I tried changing my name once, tried getting all the adults and kids I knew to call me by a better one. Nothing fancy, just James, that way I could even keep my old initials. James Weatherall, good old Jim. But no matter how hard I insisted, everyone from the teachers on down just kept right on calling me Junius or June. After a while, I got sick of hearing myself beg, so I just sighed and gave up, like with everything else I ever tried.

But anyway, none of this hypothetical stuff matters any more, cuz this is the day and the hour and almost the very minute when I'm gonna really do it.

But unlike the rest of my fucked-up, substandard life, I'm gonna make sure all the conditions under my control are just right.

First I put my favourite Slayer tape in our crappy Wal-mart boombox and set it for continuous play. I push the volume knob up to max, and when the tin walls of our "house" are vibrating, I go into the "kitchen" (really just a different corner of the trailer). The plumbing of the sink full of greasy dishes is hidden by a raw plywood cupboard with its door missing and an old shirt tacked up in its place. Pushing the shirt aside, I take out the half-full bottle of peach-flavoured brandy which

Mom bought once to make some kinda fancy recipe from *Woman's World* that turned out to be like this inedible chunky slime. Carrying the bottle, I go into Mom's "bedroom," where I drop to my knees. Supporting myself with the hand that holds the bottle, I root around under the bed with my free hand, feeling for what I need among the soap-opera magazines, slippers, and dust-kitties.

Sure enough, it's still there.

My worthless, had-to-go-and-croak Dad's shotgun.

With the brandy in one hand and the shotgun in the other, I get to my feet, shuffle back to the couch and plop down, my head about two inches away from the boombox speakers.

First I crack the barrel of the gun. The two shells are still in there, just like they have been ever since I can remember. Hope they're not too old to fire. Why Mom keeps the gun – why she keeps it loaded – I can't say. Maybe she's scared of living alone, with just a kid for protection. Maybe she wants to have the same option open to her that I'm gonna use today. Whatever. All that matters is that the gun is here and ready. I close it up and lay it down beside me on the couch.

Then I get to work on the brandy.

I never really drank more than a beer or two before. Maybe some champagne at a wedding once. But the brandy, which is so sweet as to be beyond nasty, goes down okay. In between swigs, I just let the music rattle me like a streetperson's cup full of change. It's kinda soothing in its own weird way. Every now and then I reach out and stroke the gun. The barrels are cold, like the railing on Zeppelin's stairway to heaven, the handle is smooth like an old catcher's mitt. I wonder if my Dad ever killed anything with it. I'll use it when I finish the liquor, I figure.

The Slayer tape cycles through twice and is starting on the third time, and there's only about a quarter-inch left in the bottle. My head is spinning like a turbocharged clothesdryer and every familiar piece of junk in the trailer has acquired a twin and a fuzzy halo. The jelly jar still holding the dried dead flowers Mom picked last summer, the opened box of corn flakes, the TV with only half an antenna (except now it has two). But I'm not worried about being able to get the gun positioned in my mouth and pulling the triggers – the idea still looks good to me – cuz after all how hard can it be? I mean, it's not brain surgery, right?

Then I think, oh, yeah – it *is*. Funny, real funny.

I look blurrily at the nearly empty bottle, raise it like I'm making a toast to someone, then start it toward my lips. But before I can down the final gulp of booze, I start to shiver in a major way.

This shivering is not nerves. Or not just nerves, anyhow. I suddenly realize how *cold* it is in the trailer. I can hardly feel my fingers, in fact. Shit, our propane must have run out! Mom said she was gonna order a new tank later this week. Damn! It must be about as cold inside this dump as it is out. Hell, I could freeze to death! Wouldn't that be great, they find me stiff as a board with the shotgun ready but unused. I can see the headlines now. "Major Teenage Jerk Bungles Suicide Attempt by Freezing to Death. Those Who Knew Him Not Surprised. 'He Was Always a Fuckup,' Say Classmates."

I've got to get warm somehow, or I'm not gonna be able to stay awake enough to blow my brains out.

Looking around the trailer for the nearest blanket or coat, I spot the sweater.

Mom bought this sweater last week at the Salvation Army for maybe a dollar seventy-five. I have never seen an uglier, sleazier one in my whole life. It doesn't look even *knitted* so much as it looks like the hide they stripped intact off of some butt-ugly animal. It's a jacket type – what do they call them, cardigans? – but it's got no buttons or buttonholes along its edges, so I assume it was handmade by somebody's Alzheimer-type grandmother who didn't really *foresee* the need for buttons. The sleeves have these gay-looking ribbed cuffs on them that manage to seem both loose and confining. The whole shapeless, baggy, oversized thing is fuzzy like an angora cat that just got goosed up the ass with a zillion volts. But absolutely the worst, wormiest feature of this whole worthless substandard sweater is its colour. It's a kind of puke-tinted olive, or a shit-coloured beige, or a bruised-banana brown. Words fail me to describe this horrible shade.

When Mom came in the trailer a week ago and held it proudly up, I just looked at it silently for a minute or so, then said, "Customers will definitely tip you more when you're wearing that, cuz they'll think you're a retarded feeb."

She got mad at me then and threw the sweater at me. I ducked, and it ended up half-draped over a chair, where it's stayed ever since, neither Mom nor me wanting to admit its existence. Now, too dizzy to stand, I lean across the couch, snag a corner of the sweater and pull it to me.

I must be *really* drunk, cuz the piece of clothing seems to *crawl* toward me, like something alive. I hardly use any effort, and suddenly it's in my lap.

I go to put an arm in one sleeve, then pause.

Is this *really* the outfit I wanna be found dead in?

But then my shivers get worse, and I realize it's this sweater or nothing, cuz I'm too wasted to reach anything else, and unless I get warm this whole farce will be over. I'll pass out and when I wake up I won't be able to shoot myself cuz I'll be sober again, and my substandard life will drag on forever, or at least till I'm 30 years old and ready to retire or something.

So soon I'm wearing the sweater, its buttonless front leaving a three-inch-wide stripe of my Stussy tee-shirt showing. Man, this hideous garment is really *warm*! It's like having some big ugly but affectionate dog draped over me.

Now I can get down to business.

I chug the last of the fruity booze. Then I pick up the shotgun, swing its barrels to point at myself. It's awkward holding it reversed, and my wrist starts to strain, but I figure the pressure won't last too long. Holding it at an upward angle, I move it toward my open mouth.

Then a flash from across the trailer catches my eye, and I stop moving.

It's me, my reflection, in the tall skinny unframed mirror leaning against a wall that Mom uses to check herself out before work each day.

I see a guy with long brown hair parted in the mid-

dle and caught up behind his ears, an open sweater showing his tee-shirt, with something like a microphone stand aimed at his face. The sight hypnotizes me.

It is Kurt Cobain on *MTV Unplugged*, from December of 1993, when we still had cable. All that's missing is the guitar. All that's added are my zits.

Well, well, well. So that's what I was aiming subconsciously for all along. And I never even really *liked* his music. Too much whining. It bugs me that even my going-away gesture is not original. At least I'm not playing one of *his* tapes. Oh, well, I guess there's only so many ways to do it...

I start the gun barrels moving to where I can clamp my teeth down on Death.

As I shift position slightly, the left edge of the sweater closes the gap across my chest at one spot, making contact with the right side.

Instantly, the whole front of the sweater zips *closed* with a sound like velcro *separating*. At the same time I feel a *tickling* at the back of my neck, where the collar touches it.

Weirded out, I decide instantly that *now's* the time to do it, before I can lose my mind entirely.

I mentally say goodbye, then will my fingers to squeeze the triggers.

But nothing happens.

My fingers are as rigid as frozen fishsticks.

At the same instant, words light up my brain.

Neural subject mismatch. Failure mode potential.

But it's not me thinking the strange words. It's someone – or something – else.

Accessing subject memories for historical pointers. Extremely weak referents. Synthesizing from available data. Repositioning internal chronolocator. Circa three point five years post-target-date. Acknowledged: mission failure likelihood 100 percent. Energy reserves 30 percent. Fallback mode now operational.

While this nonsense is flashing through my head, I'm desperately trying to do something, anything! Lower the gun, pull the trigger, jump up, call for help. Nothing. I'm a zombie, trapped in my own body.

I think about the tickle I felt on my neck. Has this *devil sweater* put like some kinda tap into my brain? Maybe it's a new kinda Salvation Army recruitment trick...?

Just as I start to panic helplessly in my head like a roach in a roach motel, things begin to happen.

My arms lower the gun to the couch and my hands drop it. I stand up. I start to walk toward the door of the trailer.

"Hey," I weakly say, and then when I find I can talk again, yell, "What's going on here!?"

We need transportation, says what I gotta assume is the voice of the sweater in my head.

"Transportation? For what? Where are you taking me?"

To the urban conglomeration known in pre-Rectification times as Seattle.

"Seattle!" I scream. All thoughts of suicide have been driven from my brain. Surprisingly, so have any traces of drunkenness. "That's more'n a hundred miles from here! If I'm not home for supper, Mom will kill me!"

Hyperbole, and not relevant to the mission.

I'm still being carried by my own traitor body toward the door. As I pass the kitchen table, I helplessly wit-

ness my sneaky weasel body grabbing a butter knife.

"Mission!" I yell to the air. "What fucking mission?"

Having failed to save my primary target, I am now attempting to reach one of my secondary targets, as stored in the mission rescue-table.

My hand that's not holding the butter knife is turning the doorknob and I'm opening the door. A blast of frigid air hits me – then I suddenly don't feel the cold!

"Hey, what'd you do?"

I merely adjusted upward your threshold to external temperature conditions that would normally result in bodily discomfort.

I'm down the three steps from the trailer door to the littered snowy ground, and trotting with perfect ease toward the parking lot. A chained dog barks from across the park.

"I – I can't believe this! What the hell are you? An alien? That's it, you're some kinda evil outtaspace body-snatching thing!"

The calm mechanical voice in my head manages to sound a little peeved, like I offended its dignity. *I am of human origin, and my functions are pro-Gaian. But we need not discuss this now. My resources are low, and I must concentrate on the task at hand.*

The lot is half full of the kinda old junks that people who have to live in a trailer park usually own. Approaching the first one, I try the door-handle against my will. Locked. I move on to the next. And the next, and the next –

The fourth – a 20-year-old Toronado with its bumper sticker that says GRACE HAPPENS that I think belongs to that grouchy drunk, Mister Harris – is unlocked. I crack the door and slide in. Then my hands are busy with the butter knife and the ignition. Soon I'm twisting two wires together. The motor cranks, noisy and reluctant. Using my foot, the sweater pumps the gas, the motor catches more sincerely, I shift into gear, and start to pull out of the lot.

"Hey, I can't drive!" I tell the sweater. "I never took any lessons, and I don't even have a permit!"

But I can, it says back. *And as a Turing-level Four construct, I am automatically licensed by my manufacturer to participate in all human activities consistent with my abilities.*

We're pulling out of the trailer park lot and heading north on 243. A ways off to my right is the Columbia River, its slow cold waters shining with sprinkles of holly-jolly winter sunlight. I wish I was in the river with lead weights strapped to my body.

"You idiot!" I tell the sweater, as it accelerates smoothly, pulls the car's nose out to pass a slow truck ahead of us, and then slips back into our lane as neat as some pro stock-car racer. "You may be licensed for some grand construction tour on the fucking Planet of the Vampire Sweaters or wherever it is that you come from! But here you are riding the body of 15-year-old kid without a licence and driving a stolen car! If a cop catches us, it'll be the freaking end of the ride! And what about your mission then, huh? How are you gonna accomplish it in *jail*?"

You seem worried, says the sweater, *although there is no need. The mission is solely my responsibility, although I admit that I would be stranded and helpless*

without the temporary loan of your somatic extensions. Would you like me to disconnect your senses? Perhaps you would worry less if you had no incoming data to misinterpret...?

"No! No!" I think about how helpless I felt back in the trailer when I couldn't even talk, and imagine being trapped blind and deaf inside my own head. "No, please don't shut off my eyes or ears or anything else! I don't need less information, I need more! I just wanna know what's going on here!"

A not unreasonable request. Allow me to gain access to the freeway first, where less of my dwindling resources will be needed for manoeuvring, and then I shall explain.

I begin to relax a little, unbracing my mental muscles. "Okay, fine. Maybe we can be, like, partners, right?" I hope that sounds reasonable, and that the sweater can't read my mind. Just let me get control back, and we'll see how fast I can strip this itchy, stitchy monster off!

When the sweater replies, I think I've managed to fool it. *That is the conventional method of operation between post-Rectification humans and such as I.*

I keep quiet until we pick up Route 90 heading west. Soon we're cruising smoothly along at seventy mph. I hope Mister Harris's ancient Toronado can take this kind of punishment, cuz I've never seen him drive it faster than 35 on his way to the liquor store. I realize that for the past few seconds I've actually been kinda enjoying being behind the wheel of a stolen fast car heading to a big city on some kinda mysterious errand, even if I'm not doing the actual driving. But I force myself to remember the likely consequences of this insane stunt, and my excitement disappears.

After about half an hour, when I figure I've given the sweater enough time to settle down, I say, "Um, Mister Sweater, sir, you were gonna fill me in on our mission...?"

There's something like a sigh in my head. *Yes, my failed task. If I were not operating so close to my own pre-programmed extinction, I would already have dumped the whole audiovisual database into your brain, and you'd be able simply to remember it all. But as matters stand, I must converse in this time-consuming, low-energy manner. And the baudrate is appalling....*

This talk about the monster dying gives me hope, but I try to hide it. "Well, I'm sorry you're not feeling better, Mister Sweater. But if you could just fill me in on the basics, like...?"

Of course. The outline and implications of my mission are quite simple, although the practical details are extremely rarefied. I am a highly complex artefact constructed from the nanoscale up, originating approximately a century into your future. I was sent back in time to save the life of a certain individual named Mister Kurt Cobain. Perhaps you have heard of him...?

I can't stop a laugh. "Heard of him! Of course I've heard of him! But I'm surprised anyone way up there in the future ever did."

The individual known as Kurt Cobain was a pivotal instrument in birthing the very timeline I come from. The incredible music he created in his 30s and 40s, the millions of individuals he inspired, before he succumbed to one of the new antibiotic-resistant strains of tuberculosis—He was perhaps the single most influential creative individual of your era. His life ramified down the

decades. But even more importantly, perhaps, was the way he raised his daughter. It was she who, as an adult, actually— The sweater breaks off.

"C'mon, man. The daughter, Beanie-weenie or whatever they named her. What'd she do that was so important?"

I am sorry. The indigenes of this period may not share that information. I have perhaps already said too much...

I think about what the sweater has said. Something bothers me, and I try to put it into words. "The way you talk, Cobain lived on, raised his daughter, she did something important, your world was born. If all of that's already happened, then why did you have to come back in time to make it happen?"

Because secret records show that we – that I – did.

"Whatta you mean?"

There were sealed historical documents in our possession which offered incontrovertible proof that Mister Kurt Cobain survived only through direct chrono-intervention. We were forced to intervene because once we already had.

This is making my head hurt. "So you weren't trying to change the past, you were trying to enforce it..."

Correct. And by failing to rescue Mister Kurt Cobain, I have doomed the exceedingly optimal timeline that sent me here. Doomed it, that is, unless I can succeed in saving the life of the primary backup individual.

Suddenly it dawns on me in a blaze of light. I feel humble and important all at once. "It's me, isn't it? I'm the backup individual. Only I can replace Cobain. Hot damn! I knew it all along! My life is gonna be legendary! I'm like the father of my country, right? The whole existence of the future revolves around me. That's why you stopped me from shooting myself."

The sweater is silent for a moment, like it's choosing its response carefully. *I am afraid to say that no information on your personal future has been programmed into me. Our meeting was strictly accidental, yet driven by a certain strange attractor. You are not the backup candidate. If you were, we would not be making this journey. However, this is not to say that your newly extended life has no intrinsic value or merit, on a strictly personal level without major historical significance. Remember, today is the first day of the rest of a life you would not be enjoying were it not for me.*

I'm stunned. I was so sure I had the answer. Shit, shit, shit! Oh, well, what's really changed? I was a nobody before and I'm still one. Except now I'm the puppet of a wool Terminator with delusions of saving its world.

The car has just passed under a sign announcing the junction of Route 82 with 90. Traffic is light, but we've still got a long way to go, right up one side of the Cascade Mountains, through Easton, North Bend, Snoqualmie and Preston, then down the other slope and into the city, a route I've gone once before on a school trip. I vaguely wonder again if the Toronado is up to it, but I've already kinda lost interest in this expedition. What can it possibly mean personally to a nothing like me? I think about the shotgun back in the trailer and wonder if Mom will ever let me get my hands on it again, if I ever get home.

Just like it could read my emotions, the sweater pops

in with a perky question calculated to snag my attention.

Perhaps you would like to hear how I failed to thwart Mister Kurt Cobain's self-extinction...?

"Well, not really. But I guess you're gonna tell me anyhow."

The sweater ignores my feeble sarcasm. *I was propelled by Mission Control back in time to early in the year 1993. My spatial destination was the interior of the Cobain-Love household – a closet, to be precise. There it was assumed – quite accurately, I might add – that I would be unquestioningly adopted and donned by the subject. The sweater's tone assumes an air of pride. Perhaps you might have seen one of my public appearances...?*

"Yeah, yeah, on MTV."

I did not make my nature known to Mister Kurt Cobain. There was no point, and it was agreed beforehand that he might be disconcerted. I could perhaps have been regarded merely as the token of a "bad trip," and discarded. So unlike the two of us, the subject and I never conversed. To all appearances, I was just a conventional nonintelligent garment. But whenever I was being worn, I was subtly rewiring the Cobain brain so as to remove his suicidal impulses.

I perk up. "You can do that?"

Certainly. That is one of my main functions. In fact, just seconds ago, when you thought about the shotgun again, I did it to you.

Suspiciously, I probe around inside my mind like a guy tonguing for a sore tooth. It seems impossible that a big urge like that can just be erased. But after a minute or so of inner inspection, I have to admit the sweater isn't bullshitting. It's true. I simply can't imagine killing myself any more. Or maybe I can imagine it, but there's no motivation to actually do it. I don't really know whether to be grateful or angry at this messing with my head, but because it's less work to be grateful, I don't push it.

"All right, so you're not jiving me. What went wrong with Kurt then?"

Mister Cobain's suicidal gestalt was much deeper, more longstanding and intricate than yours, and was bound up with his entire being, including, or course, his artistic drive. I had to pick it apart thread by thread, if you will allow the egotistical metaphor, without damaging his musical abilities. The treatment was unfinished when it was interrupted.

I thought I had been insulted to the max, but this took the cake. "You fixed me in like two seconds, but weren't done with Cobain after a year?"

Please do not be offended. It is simply that you have no artistic abilities. Otherwise you are just as complex and worthy an individual, of infinite value to yourself.

"Thanks for nothing. You know what? I'm glad you couldn't fix him!"

Oh, but I could have, if I had not been stolen. It happened on his last European tour. A determined and tricky American fan stole me from backstage. Perhaps you'll recall Mister Kurt Cobain's deliberate yet nonfatal drug overdose during that period...? Already he was backsliding without me. In any case, I was not donned by the thief – he perhaps wanted to preserve the mana of Mister Kurt Cobain's rather vital sweat scent intact – and so I went dormant, hoping that I would later be in a position to resume my treatment. Eventually, it

seems, by one means or another, I arrived back here in Mister Kurt Cobain's native state. But it was too late, as we both know.

All this time the sweater from the future, using my handy stolen body, has been pushing Mister Harris's old Detroit iron to its limits. We've passed RV's and flatbeds full of timber, pickups and minivans, hauling ass more or less parallel to the Yakima River, zooming by the exits for Tearaway and Cle Elum. The land has been rising around us, and we'll soon be in the actual mountains.

It is interesting to note that the drier microclimate on the eastern side of this range breeds lodgepole and ponderosa pines, interspersed with grassy meadows, in contrast to the more densely ranked Douglas firs and hemlocks we shall encounter on the other side.

"School's cancelled today, so you can skip the lesson."

Although I can't move my head, I discover that the sweater has granted me a little control of my eyes which it's sharing. I figure maybe this has something to do with its limited power supply. Anyhow, looking at the dash, I can see that we're gonna need gas pretty soon. Maybe if I don't say anything and let us get stranded, I can escape somehow...

But my bad luck is holding, cuz of course the sweater has seen the gauge at the same time as me.

My calculations indicate that we should be able to arrive safely at the pumping facilities in Snoqualmie before running entirely out of fuel. That is, if we maintain the optimal speed for this primitive engine.

A screaming siren suddenly cuts through the air. I flick my eyes up to the rearview and spot the cruiser, its rooflights blazing.

"Or unless we get pulled over by a fucking smokey."

This is unfortunate, but not terminal. Please co-operate.

"Like I got a choice!"

The sweater slows us down and comes to a stop on the highway's shoulder. We leave the engine running, cuz of no key.

The smokey is right behind us, still sitting in his car. I see him talking into his mike. Then he gets out.

The sweater is rolling down my window. The cop comes right up, a hand near his gun. He's big and mean-looking, wearing sunglasses and a scowl.

"Shut it down, and show me licence and registration," he says, so at least I know Mister Harris hasn't woken up out of his drunk and reported his car stolen. That's good. But what's bad is I got no licence.

"One moment, officer," says the sweater, commanding my vocal cords. It pops the glovebox and gets out some papers, offering them out the window. "Here you are."

As the cop reaches for them, the sweater makes its move.

Down my hand and right over the papers it flows like water, jumping across the inch or so of dead air to embrace the cop's gunhand! Then it continues up his arm, right under his shirt and jacket!

"Hey!" the cop yells, jerking back and pulling the sweater sleeve like taffy between us as he tries to go for his gun.

But then the sweater must have reached his neck, cuz his eyes roll up in his head and he falls unconscious to the ground.

The elastic sweater pulls back off the fallen cop to its

normal shape. *Not the most subtle of techniques, but all I had time or energy for.*

My voice is my own again. "You idiot! What are we going to do with a zonked-out cop and his car? He's radioed the stop back already!"

No problem.

The sweater hauls me out of the idling Toronado. With strength I didn't know I had, I lift the cop up and position him in his car, arranging his limp hands on the wheel. With his shades on, he looks like he's thinking or even dozing, and I pray that none of the few dozen vehicles that have passed us saw that much, and that none of the rest to come will bother to investigate.

Then the sweater picks up the microphone. A perfect imitation of the cop's voice comes out my mouth, reassuring the dispatcher in the proper cop-talk. This last trick isn't so amazing, cuz even I could have pulled that from watching enough Fox TV.

Shall we continue?

"Oh, sure, why not? What's a little flight after car theft and assault and resisting arrest and probably kidnapping too!"

Before too long we're fully into the mountains, and the glare from the snowpack is tremendous – until the sweater modifies my vision somehow. The traffic seems like mainly sporty new cars with skis racked on their roofs. Rich people bug the shit outta me, and these are no exception. Buncha selfish jerks without any thoughts for anyone else. You think any of *them* would give up their own suicide to go help save the world? Fat chance!

The sweater and I don't talk. I guess we're both occupied with our own thoughts.

The sign saying that the Snoqualmie exit's coming up appears after a while. And just in time, cuz I've been trying to ignore something urgent for some miles now.

"Hey, Mister Sweater, I gotta piss!"

I can easily shut off that sensation, and we shall save some time.

"No way! I'm not gonna have my bladder *burst* to save you a few seconds! How long is it gonna take for me to pee anyhow?"

The sweater considers this. *Very well. We have to leave the vehicle to obtain currency in any case.*

I don't like the sound of this, but I'm not gonna argue.

The exit is jammed and we have to go slow. Local driving conditions mean the sweater has little attention for me.

The main drag of Snoqualmie is bustling with lots of happy plastic people dressed in their fancy recycled-soda-bottle ski clothes. Spotting a gas station, convenience-store-type place, the sweater pulls us outta traffic and up to a pump. Disconnecting the ignition wires stops the motor.

Now we shall fill the tank with hydrocarbons.

It feels good to get out and stretch my legs, even if they're not really mine any more. I don't bother asking the sweater how we're gonna pay, since I figure it must have a plan.

After topping the tank off, we go inside the store and join the slow-moving line for the cashier. In front of me is a fancy-dressed babe in a white one-piece snowsuit, standing lovey-dovey close to her obnoxious boyfriend. She's carrying a Gucci purse on a strap, but the boy-

friend has his own wallet out to pay.

The sweater makes me pick up a copy of *People* and hold it with both hands. Amazingly, it opens right to a page that shows Courtney Love punching someone out.

This is a good omen, says the sweater. Then, without warning, its hem starts to stretch out at one point like some kinda vine! It snakes up through the air and into the babe's purse! Without even unsnapping the catch! I hear a kind of mild rustling noise from inside the purse, and then the tendril comes back out with a wad of money clutched in its woolly grip!

At this point the babe notices something. She clutches her purse and turns to glare at me, but I'm obviously innocent, holding my magazine, no hands free to rob her. The sweater makes me smile at her in what I'm sure is a demented way. She glares some more, pulls her purse around, opens it, obviously sees her wallet intact, gives a snort, then ignores me.

By now the sweater has put the money in one of its pockets – pockets I never noticed before. When it's my turn with the cashier, I say on my own, "Um, whatever's on pump four, this magazine, and, er, ten Slim Jims."

The sweater makes my hand bring up the money.

It's a couple of hundreds, some fifties, and, thank God, three twenties.

The clerk – a guy not much older than me – looks suspicious. But in the end, he takes two of the twenties, gives me change back.

"Uh, got a bathroom?"

"Round the rear."

I leave, already peeling the cellophane off a piece of jerky.

That was draining, says the sweater. *I shall trust you to micturate on your own.*

Hungrily chewing and swallowing the Slim Jim, I try to hold down my excitement. This is it, my last chance!

In the john, I set my purchases down on a sink. I lower my hands with my own sweet willpower down toward my fly. But at the last minute I grab the hem of the devil sweater on either side and start to yank the whole thing up over my head!

Stop! Stop! This girl will die without us!

Like sunrise over the desert, my whole brain is flooded with a portrait clear as life. It's a short-haired, dark-haired white girl with glasses, just a little older than me, kinda pretty, kinda goofy-looking, freckles, snub nose.

My arms are raised up above my head, with the sweater hiding my face. Only the collar is still around my neck, making contact with my private spinal cord. I can feel the sweater trying to make me lower my arms, but I'm mentally fighting it to a standstill! I figure I can last longer than it can, so I take the time to ask, "Whatta you mean, she's gonna die?"

Simulations of her alternate chrono-vectors reveal that under current conditions the backup candidate staged a successful suicide attempt at four-fifteen this afternoon. We have less than three hours to save her.

The image of the girl is fading, but still bright. She looks so cute and helpless. "She's really gonna kill herself if we don't stop her?"

The sweater manages to sound weary. *Correct. And every minute wasted is lost forever.*

Goddamn! This is probably the one thing the sweater

could have pulled that would get me to co-operate. After my own close call with blowing my own head off this morning, there's no way I can ignore this.

"All right! But after this is all over, you'd better help me straighten out the mess you got me into!"

If I can. But one would have thought that saving your life was sufficient compensation.

I let the sweater drop down around me. It flows alertly into place. "Yeah, well—"

The cashier is standing in the doorway looking at me like I've got two heads — which I more or less do.

"Heh, heh — just a little itchy under this thing." I turn around to the urinal on the wall, unzip and start to pee. When I'm done, I sidle out past his stunned face.

We get the car going, pick up 90 west again, and are soon descending the Cascades. I notice the different trees, something I never would've done if the sweater hadn't mentioned it.

Is it changing my mind further? Or am I changing on my own?

No way to really know, is there? And is there any practical difference knowing one way or another would make?

I go back to thinking about the girl. Another suicide. That makes three of us, Cobain, me and her. It's more than coincidence, that's for sure.

The sweater must be listening in, because it starts to explain.

The entire universe is determined by the quantum operations of consciousness upon it. Nothing can exist or come into existence without being observed. Perhaps you are familiar with the case of Schrodinger's Cat...? Well, no matter. The termination of any conscious entity closes down a multitude of possible futures. The self-termination of an individual is a unique, somewhat paradoxical circumstance, consciousness acting to negate itself. It is almost as if a black hole were to swallow itself. Such ruptures cause the very structure of space-time to temporarily fray, forming weak spots in the fabric of history. It is here that the course of events is most amenable to interference. Riding such gradients of self-destruction is what brought me to you....

"Wow, talk about your special interest groups! We should all like form a union! 'Give me what I want, or I'll kill myself and change the world!'"

I assume you are joking. Without the benefit of hindsight and petaflop computing power to chart alternate chrono-vectors, without the ability to gauge the utility and spinoffs of any individual life, such a threat would be useless.

"Well, speaking of utility, what's so special about this girl? Who is she, and what's she gonna do for you?"

Her name is Miss Ernestine Schnabel. On my original timeline, upon her graduation from the Seattle public school system next year, she became — or will become; tenses are confusing in such cases — first, the live-in governess of the young Miss Frances Bean Cobain, then later, her intimate friend and confidante. For the next 15 years, she was — or will be — instrumental in shaping the personality of that crucial individual, second only to the child's now-deceased father. Simulations, however, revealed to us that if the suicide of Mister Kurt Cobain was successful, Miss Ernestine Schnabel would eventually become so distraught as to take her own life.

Our only hope is that in rescuing her now we can somehow put her life back on the old course, and thus the life of Miss Frances Bean Cobain.

"So that crap you fed me about her definitely killing herself at four-fifteen today was just some kinda guess-work?"

Rather say a simulation with a probability close to certainty.

"You'd better hope so, or I'm gonna be really pissed."

Think how I will feel.

We leave the mountains behind us, only Ranier continuing to look over our shoulder like a hall monitor. Around us the suburbs of the city have sprung up like cow flocs. It's past three when Route 90 carries us over a bridge onto Mercer Island, then across another and into the main part of Seattle.

When we're on Boren Avenue, heading north, I ask, "Where are we going?"

To the Space Needle.

This does not reassure me.

Traffic is thick. There's an accident at the intersection of Denny and Westlake that ties us up for twenty minutes. By the time we go under the monorail line and find a parking space near the Space Needle, it's four o'clock.

We must hurry.

The sweater sets me running. Deep breaths bring the salty smells of the nearby Puget Sound into my lungs.

Inside there's a line for tickets. I mutter, so that people won't stare. "Should I cut?"

We do not want to be ejected. Be patient. Although the observation platform is a third of a mile up, the elevator ride takes a mere 43 seconds.

"Jesus, how can you be so calm!"

I'm counting on your help.

"Great. Put it all on my shoulders!"

That is precisely the vantage point I maintain.

When we're finally in the elevator, I step nervously from foot to foot. At least I think it's me doing it, and not the sweater. The ride itself seems to take a week of math classes.

At last, the top!

I bull my way out of the cage onto the glassed-in observation deck. I get about five seconds to take in the spectacular view of the city and the water and the mountains before the sweater says, *There she is.*

Miss Ernestine Schnabel is like I was shown, except she's wearing a long leather coat and standing by a window. I start toward her.

"Hey, Ernie!" I call, somehow knowing instinctively that that's the nickname she's been stuck with, just like my June.

It's the wrong move.

She turns to look at me, a perfect stranger, with a horrified expression of distrust and who-spilled-the-beans confusion, eyes wide behind her smudged glasses. Then she opens her coat, revealing jeans, an Eightball tee-shirt —

And a sawed-off shotgun.

There are definitely too many guns in this fucked-up, substandard society of ours.

I think Ernie's gonna turn the muzzles on herself, like I wanted to.

But instead she aims at the nearest window.

The double blasts sound like a 757 crashing next door. People are flat on the floor, screaming their fool heads off, alarms are blaring, and the safety glass crunches as Ernie crosses it to the railing separating her from oblivion.

The subject was known to have a penchant for the melodramatic.

I'm on her faster than I think possible, but she's already got both legs up and over, her little butt perched on the slick railing. What feels like an arctic gale-force wind blows in.

"Goodbye, whoever you are," she says, then slides forward.

I lurch and catch her under one leather armpit with both hands, the rail gouging me in the gut, my feet flailing for a hold.

I can't pull her up.

I can't pull her up!

But together, the sweater and I can.

We collapse side by side on the crunchy glass-littered floor. I keep my arms wrapped around Ernie, one cuff pressed against her neck. She seems in shock. I can hear running footsteps coming closer. Guess that lame security guard finally got his act together.

The sweater's voice is faint in my brain. Power approaching zero. Attempting to rewire subject's neural circuitry. Results uncertain.

There's silence, and I think it's dead. Then the sweater from the future speaks one last time.

Mister Junius Weatherall, I entrust care of the subject to you. If she exhibits signs of her malaise, you must attempt more old-fashioned cures. The future is counting on you.

"Hey, Mister Sweater, no! Don't go! You promised to help me! Mister Sweater!"

That is not my name. You never asked my name. My name is.... Nevermind.

And with that, Nevermind – if that was his name, and not just a last word of despair – is really gone for good.

Hands are pulling me and Ernie up and separating us, angry faces and voices are seeing if we're okay before they start to yell and threaten us, like adults always do.

Well, Ernie and I are in for an ocean of shit. But I guess we'll get across it eventually. And then just maybe she'll be a little grateful to me and won't be turned off by my zits. Ernie and June. It's so ass-backwards it sounds good. Maybe there's a future in it. Whatever.

Here we are now, entertain us.

Paul Di Filippo has contributed nine previous stories to *Interzone*, the last being "Alice, Alfie, Ted and the Aliens" (issue 117). His two published books to date are *The Steampunk Trilogy* (1995) and *Ribofunk* (1996), and he has a third due out imminently from the curiously-named (but high-quality) publishing house of Four Walls Eight Windows in the United States.

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ANSIBLE LINK



DAVID LANGFORD

Having just returned from the 1997 British Eastercon, "Intervention," I can remember four statistics about it – one for each guest of honour. Brian Aldiss had the most alphabetical primacy; Jon Bing from Norway was the most elusive, arriving unexpectedly late and fleeing early; Octavia Butler (visiting Britain for the first time) was unmistakably the most popular, with autograph queues of Pratchettian proportions; David Langford accepted the most liquid hospitality, to the detriment of short-term memory....

A HANDFUL OF DARKNESS

Steve Baxter, man of many awards, zoomed to Seattle to collect his Philip K. Dick award for *The Time Ships*, and claimed that he'd be flying the flag with "my Spice Girls union jack mini-skirt." A special PKD citation also went to Michael Bishop's *At the City Limits of Fate*.

Martin Caidin (1927-1997) died of thyroid cancer on 24 March, aged 69. His "bionic man" novel series beginning with *Cyborg* (1972) spawned the TV series whose title was an sf catchphrase, *The Six Million Dollar Man*.

Harlan Ellison chortled over his *Newsweek* commission to write about the San Diego mass suicide ("what's the difference between sf and the lunacy these people were preaching?", *Newsweek* approximately asked). At \$5,000 for 800 words, he reckoned it might be the best word rate he's ever received. However, the piece was heavily censored for suggesting that Horrid Cults and Real Organized Religions are not always easily distinguished....

Maurice Goldsmith of the International Science Policy Foundation died on 1 March after long illness. He was best known in sf as a founding father, administrator and judge of the Arthur C. Clarke Award; indeed he was on the judging panel for the still unfinalized 1997 award.

John Jarrold resigned as editor of *Legend*; tactful sources insist that he wasn't pushed; he is now working part-time on the Simon & Schuster (UK) sf/fantasy list.

Terry Nation, creator of the Daleks for the second *Dr Who* storyline ("The Dead Planet," 1963), died on 9 March, aged 66.

John Norman has not gone away. Eastercon was littered with *Gor Project* flyers that salivated over plans for a Norman-based colour magazine "in the vein of Heavy Metal and the Savage Sword of Conan." This will resurrect those literary wonders that were "Blacklisted by the feminist movement in the late 1980s" and is guaranteed to "contain not only extremely graphic violence, but slavery, bondage and erotica, not to mention oppression, starvation, suffering and death." Know your market.

Jeremy Paxman to *University Challenge* teams in March: "Published in 1996, *The Unseen University Challenge* quizbook is based on the works of which author?" *Hopeful Irish Student* (Queen's, Belfast): "Er ... the Marquis de Sade?" Far off in Reading, a Discworld quizbook author swoons, fulfilled at last.

INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

SF Classics: Hail & Farewell. Fab-bri Publishing/Brown Partworks test-marketed a new sf partwork in the Exeter and Scots Border areas. Each weekly instalment was to be bagged with an sf novel: issue 1 had *The War of the Worlds*. Modern selections were also scheduled; contributors included the usual suspects like Clute, Langford and Stableford. But the March 1997 market test was deemed a flop, since despite TV promotion and Amazing Special Offers the sales fell 13% below some mystically calculated threshold figure. Jo Bourne, project instigator, sobbingly reported that vox-pop responses from the youngish target audience tended to go: "Sounds good, but because of the kid[s] we don't have time to read books...."

BSFA Awards for 1996 work went to Iain M. Banks's *Excession* (most excessive novel), Barrington J. Bayley's "A Crab Must Try" from *Interzone* 103 (most crabby short story), and Jim Burns's cover for *Ancient Shores* (most jimburnslike art).

Dysacronymia. After an exciting internal referendum, the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America have decreed that their organization's initials are not the spluttery SFFWA but just SFWA.

UFO Funnies. Naturally the ufology world had its own slant on comet Hale-Bopp. *July 95*: comet discovered by amateur astronomers Hale and Bopp. *Nov 96*: another amateur, Chuck Shramek, posts a photo on the

net showing the comet attended by a bright object ringed like Saturn, and announces this awesome discovery through the usual scientific channels: Art Bell's US radio phone-in show. Prof (of political science) Courtney Brown explains that his "Farsight Institute" – specializing in "scientific remote viewing" and teaching it to punters at \$3,000 per course – has identified the object as larger than Earth, hollow, and under alien control. Brown claims copious further evidence on film; passes a photo of Hale-Bopp plus Object in confidence to Bell and Whitley Strieber; promises public announcement real soon now. *Jan 97*. Bell and Strieber lose patience, post image on net; instantly it's identified as a particular digital snapshot taken by the University of Hawaii Institute for Astronomy, to which the ringed object has quite clearly been added by image processing. Brown protests feebly that this could be a disinformation campaign aimed at his Institute, but neglects to say how his ace remote-viewers failed to detect the companion's nonexistence. Diehard loons realize the only possible answer: the UHIFA tampered with its own photo to erase the Thing With Rings and maintain the worldwide UFO cover-up! Meanwhile, Hale himself identifies the original mystery object on Shramek's photo as – how boring – a known and charted star whose "rings" are diffraction effects caused by over-exposure....

Then came that partly comet-inspired mass suicide, and suddenly it was harder to laugh.

"Reconvene" is the 1999 British Eastercon, to be held in the Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. Guests are Peter S. Beagle, John Clute and Jeff Noon. Contact 3 West Shrubbery, Redland, Bristol, BS6 6SZ. For 1998's "Intuition" in Manchester, contact 1 Waverley Way, Carshalton Beeches, Surrey, SM5 3LQ.

Thog's Masterclass. "When he sauntered into the squad room that bright mid-May morning, Detective Joe Slatterly raised the only other pair of eyebrows in the room, those of his partner Tom England." (William T. Sampson, "All in a Day's Work", *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine*, 4/97) ... "Muffled through wood, and howl hooted in the distance, a swift surge and halt that thrilled her boneward. There was a message in that sound, a message that resonated and spread like the bloom of a bell. She couldn't hear it or she refused. But uprising from the earth, the palm-press she'd felt earlier closed on that sound in a precise mesh." ... "Love Bunny smiled and Katt noted that, pretty as she was, her teeth stactited out of high pink gums." (both Robert Devereaux, *Walking Wounded*, 1996)

From the Dirac Sea to the Dark Lady

*Geoffrey A. Landis, NASA scientist
and award-winning sf writer, interviewed
by Aimee Kratts*

Geoffrey A. Landis was born in 1955, and his one published book to date, *Myths, Legends and True History* (Pulphouse, 1991), is a slim small-press collection of short stories. Despite his low profile in book-publishing, he has contributed stories to most of the science-fiction magazines and won both of the sf field's major awards – the Nebula in 1990 for "Ripples in the Dirac Sea," a very unusual time-travel story, and the Hugo in 1992 for "A Walk in the Sun," about an astronaut marooned on the moon. Five of his stories were first published on *Interzone*: "Jamais Vu" (issue 45, March 1991), "Paradigms of Change" (issue 53, November 1991), "In the Land of Purple Flowers" (issue 60, June 1992), "Dark Lady" (issue 98, August 1995) and "Turnover" (issue 115, January 1997). Geoff Landis is also a published poet; but, first and foremost, he is a scientist...

Where did you grow up, and what did your folks do for a living?

My family moved around quite a bit when I was a kid, so I've never had a good answer to the question, "where are you from?" I was born in Detroit, and we lived in Virginia, Maryland, Illinois, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. My father was a patent lawyer for AT&T and various Bell subsidiaries. My mother had a degree in chemistry, but except for a year teaching, didn't use her degree professionally.

Did either of them influence you toward science or writing?

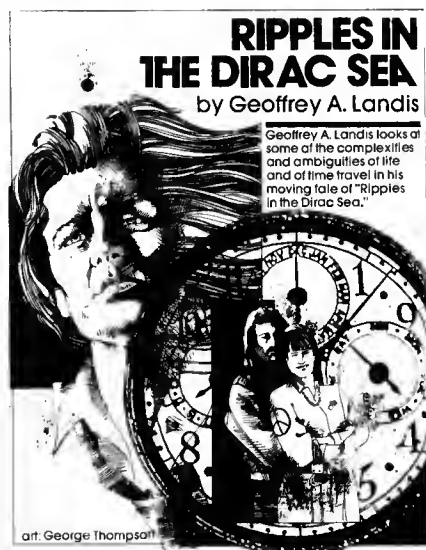
Well, my mother is a voracious science-fiction reader, and nobody in the family thought it particularly unusual that I went to the library once a week, and took out a stack of eight sf books each time (eight being the limit of books you could check out at one time from our local library). It was, I would say, a rather science-friendly house.

Did you have chemistry sets and butterfly collections or did your love of science develop later, for example in high school?

Sure, I had a chemistry set. I got bored with it, I hate to admit, when I found out that chemistry was more a matter of titrating solutions and crystallizing precipitates, than blowing things up and making mysterious compounds.

My real passion was model rockets, which I spent more time than you could possibly believe building, flying

Below: The title page from the first publication of "Ripples in the Dirac Sea," in *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, October 1988. The cover of that issue is shown on page 27.



and designing. My main event was boost-glide, that is, trying to make a rocket-boosted glider stay in the air for as long as possible. If MIT gave out degrees for what I really spent my time studying, and not what department you were in, I would have a Ph.D. in model rockets, with a minor in science fiction.

What was your first successful science project?

In my junior year of high school, I invented a way to put a cluster of rocket engines in the upper stage of a model rocket, and presented it at the MIT Technical Model Rocket Convention. The project took third place, if I remember right. It was a good project. I think it should have done better, but I do admit that it was more tinkering than actual science. The next year I presented a project called "The Zero-Volume Piston Launcher," which was a way to make a launch pad that gives the rocket an extra boost as it takes off. That was over 20 years ago, but in rocket competitions, people still use the grandson of that invention for a little extra altitude.

What did you do before you worked at NASA? Or did you go there directly out of college?

I was an undergraduate at MIT [the Massachusetts Institute of Technology]. After graduating with a degree in physics and another one in electrical engineering, I went to work for a small business outside of Boston, Spire Corporation, which was (and still is) involved in research and development. At the time they did a lot of work on solar cells, for a programme administered by ERDA (now the Department of Energy). I started out on a project to develop new methods to encapsulate solar cells against the environment, and then went on to develop silicon solar-cell technology. For a brief period, Spire had the world record for silicon solar-cell efficiency, using technology that I had a hand in developing. The efficiency has improved considerably since then, though! I also started their research on developing a low-cost manufacturing process for silicon solar cells. After I left Spire, Steve Hogan took over this project, and the manufacturing line for silicon solar cells is now one of Spire's major product lines.

I left Spire to go to graduate school in physics. I decided to go to Brown University, so I could work with Joseph Loferski, who is one of the

important figures in solar-cell development. I had some interesting ideas for thesis projects on silicon solar cells. Fortunately, they worked, so I was pretty fast in finishing my thesis and getting out of grad school.

You work as a scientist a NASA Lewis Research Center. What exactly do you do there?

I do a lot of different things. I started out at NASA as a post-doctoral fel-

low, working with the photovoltaics (solar cell) branch, and then after two years as a postdoc, joined a company with a contract with Lewis to do on-site research.

There are two areas I work in. First, I'm still involved with the photovoltaics branch, which is working on developing solar cells for space. So I still am involved in inventing new ideas, and trying

them out in the laboratory. We're also involved in worrying about what the effect of the space environment is on solar-power systems. I worked a bit on looking at solar-power systems on the moon, and after that on Mars.

My second area is in advanced concepts, which is coming up with new ideas for far future applications. I've looked at all sorts of ideas here, from solar-power satellites through use of huge laser systems to propel an interstellar probe.

I just started a new project to work on the 2001 Mars mission.

This will be an unmanned lander with the purpose of demonstrating that we can manufacture rocket propellant on Mars. I'm working on two parts of the project, a project looking at Mars dust, and another project to test out new solar cells for the power system.

Are you into the theoretical end of science or the more tangible manufacturing end?

As I've gone on, I've been less and less an actual hands-on experimental scientist, and moved more to analytical side, although I still interact a lot

with the guys in the lab.

Do you expect to stay at NASA for your entire career?

No, that seems increasingly unlikely. The research budget has been cut every year, and I don't see that this trend is going to end.

What was your first published piece of fiction?

"Elemental," which was the cover story of the December 1984 issue of *Analog*. I started writing seriously the summer before I went off to graduate school. In my spare time I kept writing, and finished "Elemental" in the spring of my second year of grad school. At that time I really didn't have an intent to become "a writer"; I just thought that it would be cool to publish a few stories. "Elemental" was accepted at the first place I sent it, *Analog*, and earned a Hugo nomination that year. Seeing it appear in print and gather some attention was enough of a kick that I decided I ought to go further with this writing thing, and so I decided to apply to the Clarion workshop that summer.

What kind of person do you think enjoys your fiction the most?

I don't think that I have a good answer to that. Intelligent, curious people, I suppose. I write a variety of different kinds of stories, and I think that different stories may appeal to different kinds of people.

Which is your greater love, working as a scientist at NASA or writing fiction?

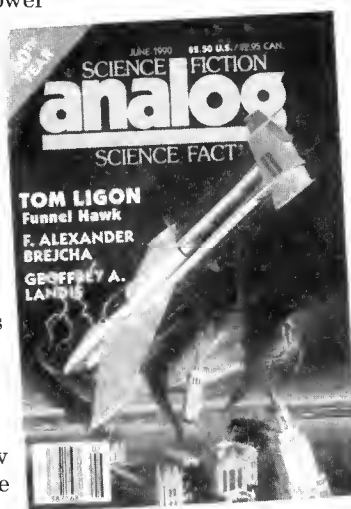
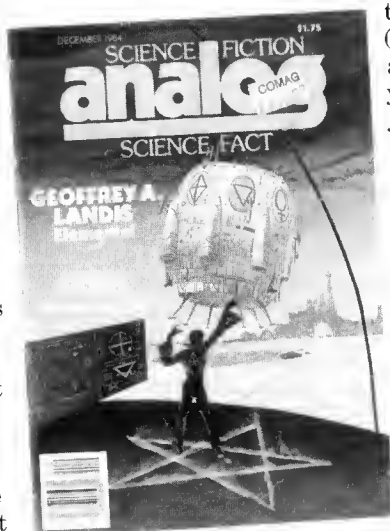
When things are going well, there's really nothing better than scientific work. 99% of the time, though, being a scientist is just putting in the groundwork. Actually, writing is a lot like that, too. I guess that writers and scientists both live

for that 1% of the time when things are flowing almost by themselves.

I don't think that I'd ever want to completely give up being a scientist.

What are your future plans as a writer? Do you have any hard and fast goals or will you continue to write whatever moves you?

No, I don't have hard and fast goals. A great advantage to not being a full-time writer is that I can write whatever I feel like working on, without having to worry about what's popular, or what's sure to sell.



How does your science career influence your writing?

Well, it does mean that I'm sitting in a position where I can see actual science being done, and I have a good feel for technology and know a lot about science, which certainly helps when I write hard sf. In fact, I have a real problem in reading most supposedly "hard" sf these days; I keep having to rewrite the story in my head to make it make sense.

One thing I've been mulling about for a while has been the rather romanticized view of scientists in science fiction (or, for that matter, in any fiction). There haven't been very many stories in which actual working scientists are portrayed in a particularly realistic manner. Benford's *Timescape* comes to mind. I've been thinking about sometime trying to write something that's a bit in that direction. Actually, a story that was published in *Interzone* – "Dark Lady" – is a bit of an attempt at doing this.

Another thing that has influenced my writing is the fact that, as a experimental scientist, I have a much better feel for the fact that, in general, things don't work the way they're supposed to. Equipment doesn't work. Things fail. Rockets blow up. One of the clichés of sf is the way that some theorist has a great idea, and puts together a gadget the next day that goes and does something. Well, heck, the average theorist couldn't tell a transistor from an electrolytic capacitor. When, in an sf story, somebody tries some desperate idea – you can tell, that's when they usually say "it's a crazy idea, but it just might work" – well, let me clue you: it probably *won't* work.

Do you do much writing at work? If so, what?

A moderate amount. Papers for conferences and scientific journals, mostly; some proposals. As I said, I work on several different things. I'm involved in a project to grow ZnSe semiconductor layers onto solar cells, to try to improve the efficiency of next-generation solar cells; this work is going pretty well right now, and we've got a paper on the subject accepted for the next Photovoltaics Specialists' Conference. I'm also working with the Advanced Concepts Office at NASA Headquarters on a new look at the concept of a "Solar Power Satellite," to convert sunlight in space to electricity, which can then be beamed back to Earth by microwaves to be used for terrestrial

energy.

Have you had any training as a writer beyond freshman English in college (excluding Clarion)?

I've taken an erratic selection of courses here and there, including an undergraduate creative-writing class I took when I was a graduate student at Brown, but I haven't really had "training" *per se* in writing. I'm in a science-fiction workshop in the Cleveland area that meets once a month.

How big an influence was Clarion in your career? What year did you attend?

Clarion did not teach me how to write sf – after all, I had already sold three stories before I went – but it did change my attitude, making me want try to tell a bit more complex stories with more attention to characterization. I attended in 1985.

Do you go to sf conventions?

Yes, I go to a few conventions each year. I usually make the Worldcon, and then two or three local conventions in Ohio or Michigan, such as Marcon. I was science guest of honour at Confusion in Michigan this January. I also do a lot of science conferences, maybe five or six a year...

Is there someone to whom you have sent your stories and poems who consistently rejects them?

Well, I've never sold anything to *Omni*, as many times as I've tried.

Have you ever taught writing sf? If not, do you have any desire to do so?

In fact, I teach a fiction writing workshop once a year for the Berea

School district's community education classes. I just started this year's class the beginning of the month. I've been doing this for about ten years. It's not a class in science fiction *per se*; it's a general fiction-writing class, but I do get probably a bit more people interested in sf than the average writing class, I expect. It's interest-

ing, I get all sorts of people with a vast range of writing interests.

What do you do in your copious spare time when you are not working long hours at NASA or writing fiction?

Read. Hike. Go to the theatre or to the movies. And, I spend a lot more time than I like to admit just looking around on the internet.

Do you write science fiction as a way to escape the confines of 20th-century technology or do you write sf because you love to write fiction with a scientific flavour?

Both, I think. I'm quite fond of the 20th century; I'm quite glad I got a chance to live in part of it, but it's important to remember that there are other centuries, and will be more to come, and they will be different. And I'm also fascinated with science, so I do love

to try to put a bit of that fascination into my work.

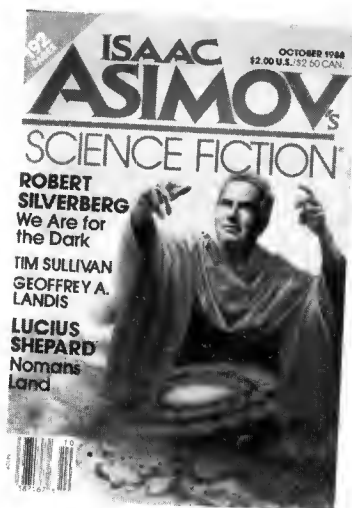
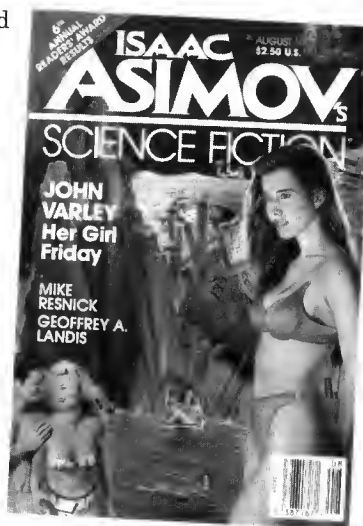
What is your strangest "fan" story?

Hmmm, I don't think that I have a strange fan story. I guess the oddest fan story is a science story: I got a letter one day at work from Sri Lanka, and it was Arthur C. Clarke, commenting about an article I published in the journal *Acta Astronautica* about using lasers to provide power to communications satellites.

What piece of your fiction are you the proudest of having written?

Everything I've written I'm in some way proud of. The stories that have won awards, of course; I'm quite glad I wrote "A Walk in the Sun," which is one of my favourites, and I'm glad it got the attention it did. Some of the stories I like very much haven't received much attention. "Beneath the Stars of Winter," for example, which was in *Asimov's Science Fiction* in January 1993, is a story that I'm quite proud of, but didn't draw much attention. "Dark Lady" is another one I like very much. It was a hard story to write. It was rejected by the major U.S. magazines, with comments that the ending was a bit ambiguous, which is a true comment; the ending was deliberately ambiguous – real life is.

I interviewed Gardner Dozois, editor of *Asimov's*, and Gregory



Feeley, a *Washington Post* sf critic, about your work. Here's what they had to say:

"Geoff is not prolific, which is a handicap. He also doesn't write books, which is a big handicap these days. Yet he's won the two big awards [Hugo and Nebula] in spite of those two factors, which means he's really got talent. He writes about science and the scientific world from a humanistic slant. While there's a hard-science content, there's also a rich emotionalism. I think he's popular because he investigates things from the POV of the people. Also, he's a good storyteller. You're interested in the story from the beginning to the end. Lots of science fiction is bright, clever ideas. In Geoff's case, the bright clever idea is supported by emotion. For example, 'Across the Sea of Darkness' is basically a hard-science generation-ship story. But the handling of it, once you get in the ship, is humanistic and emotionally charged." – Gardner Dozois

"While Landis is plainly an intelligent writer, relatively little [of his work] has affected me. 'Ripples in the Dirac Sea,' to me, has been his most interesting story but it's basically built upon an enormous number of rickety coincidences. 'A Walk in the Sun' is basically a feel-good story about endeavour rewarded and it's not very interesting. Geoff's stories about death are extremely static while his stories about life caper all over the place. Look at 'Ripples' and 'Rorvik's War': the main character in both dies over and over again in short narrative fragments. 'Walk' lights into other territories." – Greg Feeley

How do you respond to the latter?

Well, it's an interesting analysis of the structural similarities of "Ripples" and "Rorvik's War." I'm sorry that little of my work to date has affected Greg Feeley, but fortunately, science fiction is a big enough field that there's room for all sorts of different styles. I'd be interested to hear what he has to say about "Dark Lady."

Who are your favourite writers?

I tend to read a lot of the newer writers; you're always being surprised by them. I'm fond of Martha Soukup, who has a superb sense of character, and of Rod Garcia y Robertson, who has an oddball feel for the past that gives a sense of actual people instead of just historical figures living there.

I like the imagination of Phil Jennings. I like Michael Swanwick, and I'm blown away by the short stories of Bruce Sterling. I could easily name about 20 more if I wanted to think about it. Of course, when I was younger I read everything there was by Asimov, Clarke, Heinlein, Stur-

geon, Le Guin, and the rest of the classic writers.

I have a lot of problems with many of the books that are being promoted as "hard sf" these days. I guess you can't really expect writers to be experts in science.

What kind of fiction and non-fiction do you read for pleasure?

I don't have a lot of free time; I do try to keep an eye on the magazines, to see the new short stories by my favourite writers, but lately I've been way behind in that, too. A few years ago I discovered books on tape, and I'm always listening to a book whenever I'm in the car; it's a great way to read if you don't have a lot of free time! Unfortunately, I also discovered that most of the books on tape are abridged, and badly abridged at that. I have an inflexible rule – I never read anything that's abridged. I want to hear what the author wrote, not somebody's summary of it. This has meant that my tape reading has been a bit eclectic!

What scientific journals do you read regularly?

I skim a lot of journals, but about the only one I read regularly is *Physics Today*.

At convention parties, I have heard other professional writers remark that they think you are unfairly overlooked as a talented writer because you choose to write only in the short form. Do you think that is true?

It's certainly quite flattering to think so. The main prejudice is that, in general, it's impossible to sell a short-story collection these days

Below: Geoffrey A. Landis is a research scientist with NASA. Here, he is pictured with an engineering model of the Pathfinder spacecraft



unless you have a novel out. I've got enough short stories for two or three collections, but publishers aren't interested – unless you have a novel. I've sometimes thought that I have to write a novel, just to use as bait to sell a collection.

Do you think the safety of the space programme will be affected in a positive or negative way by NASA's decision to contract out more and more of the programme to private industry?

Day-to-day flight operations of manned spacecraft isn't an area that I work, so I probably don't know much more about this than the average over-educated sf-reading space enthusiast. That said, I would say that safety is not in general a question of who is managing the programme, but a question of whether you have competent, conscientious people working on the project, and do you give them the authority to make decisions and the tools to get the job done right?

Do you see humans living on the moon or Mars in the next century? Or ever, for that matter?

I could see that either way, I'm afraid. I'd certainly like to think that we will be expanding into the solar system in the next century, but it's hard to predict. Exploration always proceeds in fits and starts, as technology comes along or as people perceive new resources to be exploited. Viewed from the point of view of a century or two ahead, I don't think that the progress we've made since the moon landing 25 years ago is so shabby, although it certainly does seem excruciatingly slow while we have to wait for it to happen. But can we keep making progress, slow as it may seem, in the next few decades, which everybody seems to project as a time of diminishing expectations and skimpy budgets? I don't know.

Note: Geoffrey A. Landis's recently published stories include: "Hot Death on Wheels," Realms of Fantasy, Nov. 1996; "Ouroboros," Asimov's Science Fiction, Jan. 1997; "Turnover," Interzone, Jan. 1997; "Invasion of Privacy" and "Locked In," Unspeakable Crimes (Australia), Galley Press, 1996; and "Ecopoiesis," Science Fiction Age, May 1997. For more information about Geoff Landis, his writing, or his work at the Ohio Aerospace Institute at NASA Lewis Research Center, see his web page – www.sff.net/people.Geoffrey.Landis/

Mother Tongue

Catherine Mintz

It had been there, at the corner of her vision, for several days, a dark fleck on the world, some tiny bit of debris knocked loose when she fell on the ice last Thursday. She tapped her papers into a neat stack and sighed. It kept its position in her field of view, no matter if she looked up or down or peeked sideways.

Frustrating, but a minor thing compared to finishing her book.

She picked up the title page, let her mouth silently shape the words, *The Rediscovery of Our Mother Tongue*, put it down again to stare out at the grey, dank day. Her work was based on simple observations, many that others had made before her.

But that was true of most discoveries. How many children had seen how neatly South America fitted into the coast of Africa before one man seriously considered the idea, and how many years passed before others refined and tested his theory? Yet now the whole story of the moving continents is known, and known to be true.

What she had found would be even more revolutionary.

She tapped her fingers on the pile of manuscript, remembering when she first knew what she had found: the code to the first language, the one that our ancestors spoke before they drifted apart into different tongues, cultures and colours. Her reconstruction was far from complete; in fact, it was the merest beginning. It was enough, however, that the goal was in sight.

She smiled.

This published, computers would be loaded with every word known, comparisons made, original bases calculated, and the entire mother tongue recovered. United by a language embedded in the deepest structures of the brain, there would be few limits to what mankind, *humankind*, might accomplish.

A bus roared past the corner.

She looked up and saw the shadow in her own eye against the face of the clock. This evening, final proofreading, then the careful packing and the trip to the post office next day. She liked to make a bit of a ritual of sending off her books...

Abruptly, she really saw the time, and began to hurry, pulled on her coat, picked up her briefcase,

went to face the 30 student faces waiting to be fed information. Making a mental note to ask about the fleck when she picked up her new sunglasses on Saturday, she shut the door a little too hard, and was off.

It was nearly dark when she got home, soaked by a cold rain that was going to turn to ice and then snow before the night was over. She toed off her shoes, shed her coat, her jacket, propped her briefcase on the hall table. Stripped herself all the way into the shower, where she stood until the flesh of her toes crinkled.

Dinner baking in the oven, she wandered about, making the bed, straightening her makeup on the bathroom shelf, making a note to get an appointment at the hairdressers, almost enjoying the tap of rain and sleet, and the groans of the wind-lashed trees.

She microwaved a cup of tea, and padded into her office to drink it, but avoided looking at the white block of paper dead centre on her desk blotter. Not until she'd had dinner, relaxed a bit, cleared her mind completely so she could concentrate on the search for the misplaced comma, the word that was wrong for its context, the little errors that grammar- and spell-checkers didn't spot.

She spooned the hot food out of its foil trays and onto a plate, something she normally didn't bother to do. One of those little rules for surviving living alone: don't eat out of the pot; never sleep in an unmade bed; be sure your underwear is clean.

Rinsing the plate under the tap, she sighed. Foolishness. It was just the expected let-down after finishing a big piece of work, the moment when she could look around and see how many everyday things she had left undone. When the next project took her, she would be oblivious.

Nonetheless, she loaded the washer from the hamper.

By the time she was ready to take up the book, the rain had turned to the shuffle and hiss of icy snow, counterpoint to the hum of the washing machine. A quick check with the weather channel showed it was unlikely anyone would be going anywhere tomorrow.

She put her teacup in easy reach.

No reason to hurry, but the manuscript drew her, and pencil in hand, she began turning over the

pages. She read top to bottom, back to front, having learned that let her see what was there rather than what she expected to see. The wind moaned unintelligibly in the branches.

Crouched, naked, in the midst of a vast landscape of brown earth under a brooding sky, she knew it was a dream, although the ground under her toes had the texture of peat, and the air smelled of wet rock and storm. She was here to receive the gift of language.

She knew that, without knowing how she knew.

She drew a circle around herself with her right great toe, and waited, arms upstretched, eyes closed, mouth open, tongue out-thrust, feeling the words rush into her, like water filling a jug.

A hard gust of wind against the windows brought her awake with a start. Mouth so parched her tongue felt swollen, she drank cold tea, stood, stretched, and drew the drapes closer together. She put the two blocks of paper, read and unread, on her desk, and weighted them both against the flow of cold air from some unseen crack, and went upstairs. Bedtime.

She pulled the blanket over her shoulder, and slept.

It was a tower of square ramps, built of bricks brought by pilgrims, the poorest carrying only one or two, the richest bent forward under their loads. Thousands united in their desire to reach up to the sky and explore the secrets of the universe.

Disembodied, she flew over brilliant silver water and dull gold earth until she was on the rough, unfinished, topmost ramp high in the dark clouds, where thunder and lightning clashed. The wind tore at her hair, and she felt everything beneath her give way, and fell.

Until with a shudder she came to herself, and found she was standing beside her own bed, listening to the stormy night. I'm obsessed, she thought. She turned back the sweaty bedding, went to the bathroom, paced about a bit, putting distance between herself and the dream world.

Downstairs, one hand on each of the two pale blocks of manuscript on her desk, she stared unseeing at the folds of the drapes, feeling the raised letters on the laser-printed paper with her fingertips. The ultimate tragedy, that parting of the ways symbolized by the fall of the Tower of Babel. Soon, it would all change.

Struck by a realization, she straightened abruptly: she'd thought of distinction but not of fame. One must give credit where it was due, but she intended to make it clear she was proud of what she'd done. So many old wrongs would be righted, so many others never come to pass. It would take time, but this was the first blow in the re-unification of mankind.

Humanity, she corrected herself.

It was quieter. She opened a crack between the drapes with one hand, contemplated the stark black and white, closed them again. Tomorrow her creation would go out into the world. Meanwhile, she would lie in bed, listen to the sound of snow falling, and think of absolutely nothing until she slept again.

They wailed in wordless grief, the long lines of men and women robed and hooded in black. She saw no more of

any of them than the occasional flash of a hand or the glint of light along a use-polished staff as they turned toward her, their silence condemnatory.

She knew who they were: the storytellers, the poets, the historians, the lovers and users of words, all mourning the death of all they had created. For all those worlds of words would die, as surely as some beast, its throat slit by the sacrificial knife, dies on the altar of gods unknown and unknowable to it. Their works would fade as their languages did, overwhelmed by the deeply-rooted past.

The long line wound itself about her, every hooded head lowered, until on a great wail of wind, they looked where she crouched, naked, hands covering herself, and she saw there was only void where their faces should have been.

She screamed.

And woke to the pale light of dawn, stomach tight with wonder and terror, and went downstairs to package her manuscript with cardboard, tape, and self-sticking labels, safe with the babble of the weather report, ignoring the sliver of shadow in the corner of her sight. A small woman, barefoot and in a bathrobe, about to change the world and careful not to think of it.

Catherine Mintz has appeared in these pages just once before, with "Stone Jungle" (IZ 108). She lives in the City of Brotherly Love, in William Penn's Land, in the North American Colonies.



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SUNK GOOD

Stephen Baxter

Apollo drifted between Earth and Moon. Fifty thousand miles behind Apollo a gibbous Earth loomed, huge and bright. And opposite, 180,000 miles ahead, there hung a tiny crescent Moon, like a Chinese lantern.

The Earth was white. And the Moon was brick red...

...and it was beneath that crimson Moon that I was stationed, as penalty for my heterodoxy, on the surface of the First World: the hell-planet, orbiting less than a solar radius from the surface of the bloated sun itself.

Hell-planet, perhaps. But there was once life here.

We can find traces of complex carbon compounds in the deep, subducted rocks. We can reconstruct how this world's biosphere must have operated, in the youth of the sun, with rich and complex cycles based (unlike our own ammonia-dependent processes) on the unlikely combination of water, carbon dioxide and oxygen.

Yes – oceans of water!

There was even intelligence here.

Oh, after so long, after billions of revolutions of this twin world around its sun, no artefact could remain on the surface: no proud symbol of their presence, for every material used to construct vessels or buildings would long since have crumbled to its constituent chemicals. But, nevertheless, in the deeper layers of the old continents, even in the rock subducted beneath desiccated sea beds, we found traces: layers of metals and pollutants – lead and zinc and cadmium – evidence of mining, deep caches of certain isotopes of uranium.

There are even, in places – in the ash from long-dead volcanoes, restored to the surface by tectonic cycles – the remnants of bodies. Artefacts nearby, of gold, platinum

and mercury, some ceramics.

Piece by piece we learned much of them: these shambling sacks of water with their unruly, chaotic culture, who so briefly dominated their own planet –

– and, I came to believe, touched the surface of their Moon!

Traces only, granted, and in six isolated sites, scattered over one hemisphere of that pocked, ancient satellite.

The geological cycle of the First World was my assignment. I was not supposed to be studying the antique intelligence of the First World – still less evidence of voyages to that solitary Moon!

But that – curse my heterodoxy! – is what I discovered.

It was difficult to understand how this could be so. How could water-heavy life transmit itself across such a gulf of space? Even if it did, in some form of spaceborne spore, perhaps, why should it be restricted to those six sites? Why should it not spread over the whole satellite?

It made no sense.

Therefore I formed an outrageous hypothesis.

I suggested that the life traces were carried there by conscious intent. The inhabitants of the First World, at the bright dawn of time, travelled to their satellite, and left marks in its shattered soil.

Well, my hypothesis aroused predictable outrage. I already had a reputation for controversy after my original heterodoxy. There was no sign of the use of advanced propulsion technology on the Moon: fusion, zero-point energy, spacetime inflation. Not even nuclear fission! So how did they get here? With chemical rockets, children's toys? And they showed no evidence of the

global cultural organization which would have made such an endeavour possible; they were squabbling, territorial creatures.

And why just six landing sites?

Six journeys, and then no more? A tide of life, reaching up from the First World to its satellite at those six points, then falling back?

Yes. It was absurd.

I needed more evidence.

In my own time, defying my superiors, I began to seek a way to show how such flights could have been achieved, with appropriate technical and cultural logic: flights from the First World to its battered Moon...

...a Moon which rose like a shard of bone in the blue dome of sky over New Mexico scrub, as Slade walked towards the Flight Operations Control Centre.

The DC-X – also known as *Sun God* – sat on the flat, baked plain of the White Sands Missile Range. The rocket, swathed in boiling hydrogen, was a misshapen cone, like a stubby, isolated minaret maybe 40 feet tall. Heat haze shimmered before it. The craft was visibly battered, dinged-up and scorched, after the multiple test flights it had already taken.

A countdown intoned from a primitive PA system, the terse numbers and technical data echoing away across the sands. The sun was directly in Slade's eyes, the light on his head, face and chest a tangible presence; it seemed as unfiltered as if he were in space.

Dream on, he thought.

It was June, 1997.

Slade reached the Control Centre, which was just a ten-yard trailer set up three miles from *Sun God's* launch pad. He entered and sat in front of a computer screen. Two McDonnell engineers were here waiting for him, with their own consoles and controls. But during the flight phase, *Sun God* would be Slade's ship, and that suited him just fine.

The countdown proceeded, calm and controlled. And –

Light burst from the base of the craft, the pure, clear glow of burning hydrogen. All of three miles away, the exhilaration of ignition made Slade's soul rise. A billow of white smoke blasted sideways, out across the desert surface, stirring the cryogenic clouds, which were soon stained yellow by kicked-up sand.

The conical craft slid smoothly into the air, soon rising above its support structure. When it had risen out of the hydrogen cloud, that clear flame, lengthening, was all but invisible.

Then the rocket ship slowed to a halt, 30 yards above the ground. It was astonishing. Rockets weren't supposed to *do* that.

Now the DC-X responded smoothly to its programming, tipping and scooting a few yards back and forth across the desert, moving simply by tilting its four rocket nozzles, directing the thrust. The engineers rattled through their tests.

It looked so easy, Slade thought. But it wasn't.

The problem with spaceflight was, humans were trapped here, on the surface of the Earth, by the laws of physics. If you were going to use chemical engines to get to orbit from Earth, you needed a 90 per cent mass fraction: 90 per cent of your take-off mass had to be fuel. Back in the 1960s, when they first built the Atlas,

they could get no better than 70 or 80 per cent.

This little craft, the DC-X, looked good, but its mass fraction was only 60 per cent. It was supposed to pioneer technologies to push up that mass fraction. For this flight it had been given all kinds of fancy modifications, like a new graphite epoxy hydrogen tank, a lox tank made from aluminium-lithium alloy, and an oxygen-hydrogen reaction control system that used excess fuel from the main tanks.

DC-X was a one-third prototype. The full-scale version – 120 feet tall, just a little taller than John Glenn's Mercury-Atlas – would weigh in at 500 tons, and be capable of carrying two crew to orbit.

But it wouldn't be piloted. The crew would be passengers, helpless as babies, stuck in the metal belly of the craft.

Well, it probably wouldn't ever get built. Even if it did, it was so far in the future Slade wouldn't see it.

But here he was anyhow, flying *Sun God* back and forth, in little arcs over the desert.

Slade, aged 67, had been in aviation – specifically, rocket craft – all his life. He was an old lifting-body man. After Patuxent, he flew the old X-15 a couple times. When his buddies were applying to NASA in the 60s, for Mercury, he just wasn't interested. He wanted to stick with spaceplanes. He figured those dumb ballistic capsules just weren't the future.

Well, he'd been proven correct. There had been that scare when the Russians had first thrown up their heavy satellites and their cosmonauts, but it was soon obvious that the Soviets' technical lead was only in heavy-lift boosters. Just one American had flown in orbit – John Glenn, in 1961, in his tin-can Mercury capsule atop an Atlas booster – and then the nation had backed off. And when John Kennedy had called for a decade-long programme to reach the Moon – the *Moon*, with throwaway boosters and ballistic capsules, for God's sake – he had been roundly howled down.

America had gone back to Eisenhower's slow and steady approach. And so, after 40 years, the Atlas, steadily upgraded, remained America's only orbital booster system, with a capacity to orbit of a few tons.

But anyhow Atlas was enough for practical purposes like weather satellites and comsats. You didn't *need* anything more powerful, unless you wanted to do something seriously dumb like fly to the Moon! The research had gone on into new technologies, slowly and incrementally.

There was no rush.

And Slade, to his own surprise, had grown old watching it all go by, waiting for a chance to fly.

Of course *this* wasn't piloting. The DC-X was completely controlled by the computer. Slade had what the engineers called trajectory command over the bird. He was sending in pre-scripted plays like a gridiron coach, then leaving it to the software to execute the plays.

But that was okay. You didn't need much imagination to believe you were up there, in the tip of that cone, flying.

Sun God stayed in the air by standing on a rocket flame – just like a lunar lander would have worked – in fact, he thought now, he'd have been more than happy to sit on the nose of that thing and ride it down to the surface of the old Moon itself, with Bado.

– And as he framed that idea, he saw Bado again. In

his unwelcome memory that treacherous old X-15 came barrelling out of the sky once more, slamming Bado, his good buddy, into the high Mojave – that soft crump, the almost gentle puff of dust.

Damn, damn. It had always seemed so *wrong*. Maybe in some other life, he and Bado could really have flown some kind of Mercury capsule down to the surface of the Moon. Maybe that was where his recurring dream came from –

– in which Bado came loping out of a shallow crater, towards Slade. He looked like a human-shaped beach ball, his suit brilliant white against the black sky, bouncing happily over the sandy surface of the Moon –

– but then there was the other half of his dream, where he was just a kid, toiling in the guts of some huge space-rocket factory, forced to speak a guttural European tongue –

Moons and mountains. Recurring dreams. An old geezer thing, evidently.

But the Moon probably would have killed them anyhow. There were scientists who said the mountains there would crumble like meringues if you set foot on them, or the dust itself would explode and swallow you up.

Anyhow, Slade was going to die without ever *knowing*. Time to bring her in.

Sun God swept through a smooth arc towards the splash of concrete that was its landing pad. The bird slid down through the last few feet, as smooth as if it was riding a rail down to the ground, and he let the automatics finish the touchdown. *Sun God* just stuck out its four landing legs and landed on its pad, as gently as a dragonfly settling on a lily.

Slade got out of his chair. His back and shoulders were stiff; he worked his fingers and arms to loosen up the muscles.

A tech was slapping him on the back. “How about that,” he said. “Just as fat as a goose. Outstanding.” “Yeah. Outstanding.”

Slade stepped out of the trailer. It was still bright morning; the flight had lasted just minutes. And in the sky, that big old Moon hadn’t yet set; it just hung there – oh, hell, something must be wrong with his eyes, he spent too much time peering at those damn computer screens – the Moon was bright red...

...red in the light of the sun, which has swollen to a crimson giant in its old age, its hot breath suffocating the First World – and yet, paradoxically, scattering life over our own more remote globe.

Yes: at last, the First World was betrayed by the star that gave it life. The end came when the surface grew so hot that the very stuff of water-based life – complex molecules and carbon-based molecular chains – was broken down.

Finally those unlikely water oceans boiled, and huge clouds of vapour were suspended in the atmosphere, driving temperatures higher still, ever faster. But even the clouds did not last forever. At last the water vapour in the air was broken up by energetic sunlight and the hydrogen driven off into space, leaving a planet baked dry, its surface cracked and flattened under a dense, sluggish atmosphere, utterly lifeless –

In any event it seems clear that my putative water-laden Moon voyagers did not have the means to escape

their planet, or to avert their ultimate doom.

Trips to the Moon: logic was not enough! My simulation had taught me that, at least. “Logic” to these creatures meant starving their projects of resources! And besides, nobody logical would attempt to travel between this world and its Moon with such primitive technology. Nobody sensible.

But these people were neither logical nor sensible. I knew I must remember that.

I sought a logical political structure in their reconstructed history, a structure that could have commanded significant resources. I reset the parameters of the simulation –

But I was speaking of my search for evidence of space-flight by this antique intelligence, of its travel to the desiccated satellite:

The inner system, at the bottom of the sun’s gravity well, is crowded. Conditions are quite unlike Home, which is, of course, the largest satellite of the Fourth World. (Although, it is not well known, once the Fourth World sported a gigantic ring system, made up of chunks of ice and other debris, residue from the formation of the sun. The rings must have been beautiful. But they have long since evaporated, as the sun’s heat roared in the faces of its children –)

I digress.

The First World, then, swims through a cloud of debris, of thousands of planetesimals left over from the untidy formation of the System, aeons ago. Despite geological smoothing, its surface shows the evidence of repeated bombardment, which has diminished but not ceased with the passing of time. Its airless satellite is scarred still more impressively.

I studied the orbital characteristics of one such planetesimal in particular. Many of these objects had orbits close to or crossing the First World’s. But in this case, the parameters were so close to those of the First World that I grew suspicious.

Then excited.

Could this be the artefact I had sought? Not on the surface of either world – but some form of abandoned spacecraft, or space colony, circling the sun with its mother planet?

I scraped together funding for a mission to the anomalous planetesimal: a small ship to sail through the light of the Moon...

... the light of the Moon which shone like a torch beam into the dormitory as Slade woke, reluctantly. Already the older men were moving around him, shuffling, conserving what energy they had.

The mornings were the worst.

Everything was slow here – even dressing was slow – and Slade was hungry by the start of his work, at five a.m. And yet he would receive nothing but his soup, at two in the afternoon.

It was 1946. Slade was 16 years old.

Slade lay in his rat-chewed blanket as long as he could.

Today was worse than usual. He felt – strange.

As if he shouldn’t be here.

He couldn’t stay on his rough pallet.

Soon would come the rush into the smoking mouth of the tunnel into the mountain, with the SS guards

lashing out with their sticks and fists at the heads and shoulders of the worker herd which passed them. That tunnel was like Hell itself, with prisoners made white with dust and laden with rubble, cement bags, girders and boxes, and the corpses of the night being dragged by their feet from the sleep galleries –

When he got up he had to rush. Otherwise he would not witness the hangings, and that was against regulations.

Actually, the hangings seemed wasteful to Slade. A victim would be gagged with a metal bar across the mouth, and the bar tied at the back of the head with wire, drawn in so tightly that the metal gag would bend, and the wire cut into the flesh of the face.

So much metal!

It was well known among the workers within the Mittelwerk that Hitler had ordered the production of no less than 20,000 of von Braun's A-4 rockets – or rather, what the Germans now called their V-2: V for *Vergeltungswaffe*, revenge weapon. And then there was the demand for thousands more of the ambitious V-3s, the A-4b design with the nuclear-tipped glider on its nose, capable of skipping across the Atlantic and digging more glowing craters into the eastern seaboard of defeated America.

How could this immense production operation spare so much metal on mere hangings?

But then – thanks to those very rockets of von Braun, which had subdued Europe and Asia and fended off America – Hitler could now exploit the resources of two continents. A little hanging wire was nothing.

Slade performed such calculations, even as he reflected on the fact that at the next roll call it could be *him*, suspended up there like a chicken in a butcher's shop.

At 16, Slade was prized by the supervisors for his ability for skilled work. So he was assigned to lighter, more complex tasks. In the process he was forced to absorb a little German. So, gradually, he picked up something of the nature of the great machines on which he toiled, and learned of the visions of the Reich's military planners.

They would construct an immense dome at the Pas de Calais – 60,000 tons of concrete – from which rocket planes would be fired off at America in batches of 14 at once. And then there were the further schemes: of hurling rockets from submarine craft, of greater rockets like von Braun's A-9, which might hurl a man into orbit in a glider-like capsule, and – the greatest dream of all! – of a huge station orbiting 5,000 miles above the Earth and bearing a giant mirror capable of reflecting sunlight, so that cities would flash to smoke and oceans might boil.

Thus would be secured the future of the Reich for a millennium.

And when that was done, von Braun talked of flights beyond Earth itself, in new generations of his giant rockets, hurled upwards by brute force: even of a nuclear-launched spaceship called *Sun God* which would send Germans to the Moon by 1955, to Mars a mere decade later.

Such visions!

But for Slade the V-2 was the daily, extraordinary reality. That great, finned bullet-shape – no less than 47 feet long – was capable of carrying a warhead of more than 2,000 pounds across 200 miles! Its four tons

of metal contained no less than 22,000 components! And so on.

Slade came to love the V-2.

It was magnificent, a machine from another world, from a bright future – and the true dream inherent in its lines, the dream of its designers, was obvious to him. Even as it slowly killed him.

One day, in the sleek, curving hide of a rocket ship, he caught a glimpse of his own reflection.

He looked into his own eyes unexpectedly, suddenly fully aware of himself. He had a sense of the here and now – or rather of vividness, as if the casual numbness of his life had been lifted, briefly. He hadn't seen a mirror in three years, since the Nazis swept through what was left of Britain, and he was separated from his parents and, as an American, rounded up as an enemy alien.

He saw a skinny, half-bald kid, with blood running down his cheek from some wound he hadn't even noticed.

– and an old man, his face twisted down under a coating of desert gypsum –

– and a gold visor, a glaring landscape reflected there –
– flames –

Visions. It was probably the hunger. What else could it be?

He subsided to numbness, and dreams.

One morning, so early that the stars still shone and frost coated the ground, he saw the engineers from the research facility at Peenemunde – Wernher von Braun, Walter Riedel and the rest, smartly uniformed young men, some not much older than Slade – looking up at the stars, and pointing, and talking softly.

Slade glanced up, to see where they were looking. It was the crescent Moon, dimmed by the smoky light of some town which burned on the horizon. And *there* was the dream which motivated and sustained these young, clever Germans: that one day the disc of the Moon would be lit up with cities built by men – Germans, carried there by some gigantic descendant of the V-2.

Slade could understand how these young men from Peenemunde were blinded by the dazzling beauty of their V-2 and what it represented. But Slade was no rocket engineer; he was no more than garbage, just one of the 30,000 French, Russians, Czechs, Poles, British and Americans who toiled inside this carved-out mountain. And in the dormitories at night would come the whispers, schemes of hidden weapons and tools, the uprising to come which would shatter the Reich.

The duality of it crushed Slade. Was such squalor and agony the inevitable price to be paid for the dream of spaceflight?

But perhaps it was. Perhaps only the organization of all of mankind's resources, under some such system as Hitler's, was capable of breaking the bonds of gravity. Perhaps it was necessary for von Braun's beautiful ships to rise from ground soaked by the blood of thousands of slave workers like himself, with expended human souls burning like sparks in the gaping rocket nozzles.

How he envied the young engineers from Peenemunde, who strutted about the Mittelwerk in their smart uniforms; *they* seemed to find it an easy thing to brush past the stacks of corpses piled up for daily collection, the people gaunt as skeletons toiling around the great metal spaceships!

He even imagined how it would have been had he

been born to become one of these smart young Germans in their SS uniforms. How he envied them! And a part of him hoped that they could achieve some piece of their huge dreams before the inevitable tide of anger rose up and swept them all to the gallows.

When he immersed himself in such dreams, something of his own, daily pain would fall from him, and he could lift his head to the Moonlight...

...the Moonlight which washed over the machined surface of my planetesimal. The object was small. But even at a great distance from it, I could detect its artificial nature.

It was a slim cylinder. One end was domed, the other terminated by a complex encrustation of equipment, including a flaring nozzle. It bore no markings.

It tumbled slowly.

It was extremely old. Sublimation had left its aluminium skin so thin it was, in places, almost transparent. In fact the hull was punctured, after billions of orbits around the sun.

The artefact was fortunate to have survived intact at all.

I approached cautiously. I could see into its interior, through rents and dimples in the hull. There was some form of double chamber in there. There was no sign of activity, of light, of energy.

The cylinder dwarfed my craft.

After circling its exterior, I gathered my courage, and I approached the terminal dome, where an eroded breach afforded me access.

I found myself rising into a cylindrical chamber, up from the cup of the dome. Stars and ruddy sunlight gleamed through hull rents. Far above me, hanging down as if swollen, I saw another dome.

The chamber was all but empty. The walls were lined with small pieces of equipment: spherical casks, ducts, pipes.

I rose through the silent grandeur of the artefact.

I passed through the upper dome, deep into the heart of the artefact. I entered a second chamber, braced with a metal frame. It was much smaller than the first.

There was no sign of occupation, no evidence of life.

I continued my inspection, baffled – at first – as to the purpose of this artefact.

But soon I formed an hypothesis.

My rogue planetesimal was clearly an artefact. But I had misinterpreted its nature.

It was no spaceborne habitat. Those great cylindrical chambers were tanks, which once bore fuel. Liquid fuel.

I came to believe the artefact was a crude rocket. It must have driven itself forward by burning liquid chemical propellants together, and allowing the expansion of gases through the terminal nozzle. The dimensions of the tanks were consistent with the relative densities of liquid hydrogen and liquid oxygen. These would burn vigorously together, if appropriately controlled.

I elaborated my original hypothesis:

I argued that the creatures of the First World had used chemical rockets like this one to escape from their planet's gravity well, and to travel to their satellite.

Yes – chemical rockets!

Well, I was mocked, as I might have expected. I concede it seems absurd that such a journey might be attempted with such limited technology.

But it is not impossible!

I argued my case. I was disciplined, for neglecting my primary studies.

So I determined to prove, by dramatic demonstration, how such a flight could have been achieved! I would reconstruct the chemical Moon ships from the dawn of time, and prove it was this way.

That was the start of it. But soon my simulations were going badly.

These squabbling, water-stuffed, energy-fat, demon-obsessed monsters! If logic would not motivate them, if they were unable to govern themselves and their resources without brutality and waste, I knew I must try illogic.

I reset the parameters of my simulation once again. I would not rest until I had reconstructed the hydrate creatures from so long ago, sailing to the Moon...

...sailing to the Moon, Slade was working through a plastic bag of chicken soup. He took a spoonful of the soup, tapped the handle, and the glob of soup floated off, still holding the shape of the spoon. But when he poked the liquid with a fingertip, surface tension hauled it quickly into a perfect, oscillating sphere. Slade leaned over to suck it into his mouth, a little green ball of chicken soup.

It was Slade's fourth spaceflight, in six years. He'd never yet got bored with the zero-gravity environment.

The two other crew – Lunar Module Pilot Bado, and Command Module Pilot Pond – ate without talking. And that was the way Mission Commander Slade, in his centre couch, preferred it.

It was August, 1967. And Apollo 3 was heading for the Moon.

A splinter of crimson-sunset light, from the Command Module's windows above him, caught Slade's eye. He looked up. Whatever it was had gone; the windows were just rectangles of darkness.

The red of the Moon had been like –

– the red of an old man's rheumy eyes, peering across some Godforsaken desert –

– the red of a kid's blood, toiling in some brutal mountain –

Slade tried to focus. He felt disconcerted, unsure, vaguely disturbed. His instincts were ringing alarm bells.

Maybe it was the ship. There had been a shit-load of problems already on this trip. If this was an aircraft he'd get out before taking her up – peer into the vents and kick the tyres – try to back up his hunch.

But that wasn't an option.

Anyhow the others didn't seem to have noticed anything.

The meal over, it was time for work.

Slade toiled steadily through his pre-transposition checklist, throwing switches and recording settings and readings. En route to the Moon, *Sun God* was still mounted on top of the S-IVB – the spent Saturn V third stage booster – with its nose pointed forward. Now, to gain access to the Lunar Module – still housed within its adapter cone at the top of the booster – CM Pilot Pond had to uncouple *Sun God* from the stack, turn it around, and dock it nose-to-nose with the LM, the Lunar Module.

Pond called out a countdown.

Slade heard a muffled thump, a soft push at his back.

Sun God had become detached from the depleted S-IVB booster stage. Pond fired up the reaction control system, and let *Sun God* drift away from the booster – “Uh oh,” Pond said. “I got a twelve-oh-two alarm.” This was a computer programme alarm, flashing up on Pond’s display unit. “Something to do with a memory overload. It came up when I engaged the rendezvous radar. And it – shit.”

The alarm code had changed to “twelve-oh-one.”

“Houston, are you copying?”

“Stand by, *Sun God*. We’re working on it.” The capcom’s voice betrayed nothing.

Slade snorted and slammed the palm of his hand against the computer. One little glitch and the docking was on hold.

There was nothing he could do now but wait. And all the time, Slade knew, *Sun God*, on its separate trajectory, was drifting farther from the S-IVB; already the gap had opened up to two miles. To recover now they’d have to go through a full-scale rendezvous procedure.

– and still he had that sense of dislocation: of things being not quite *right*. As if an engine was running off –

Slade was beginning to think his mission might be snake-bit: doomed to failure. They had had problems with the Apollo since they left the ground. Lousy comms. Computer glitches. Foul stench from the life support. Scuffed wiring. Stuck hatches. Inoperative reaction control thrusters.

Slade had followed the evolution of his ship through its manufacture. He had seen the NASA QA report that had called it sloppy and unsafe. He knew there had been 20,000 failures during its construction and testing. He knew it was just a lousy bucket of bolts that should never have left the factories, at Palmdale and Bethpage.

But here was Slade flying this clunker to the Moon, because that was the timetable of America’s mad, impetuous dash into space, and Slade would have been aboard if he had to get out and push.

It was six years since Slade’s first flight in space. He’d finished three orbits of Earth on the second orbital Mercury flight, in 1961, following John Glenn. He’d hung in there, piling up flight assignments, while younger, smarter guys came into the programme to compete with him. He’d gotten a Gemini flight, and a seat on the first Earth-orbital Apollo test flight in 1966. He was the only man to have flown all three generations of US spacecraft.

And now here he was – commander of his own lunar ship – on his way to the ultimate piloting test, the Moon landing itself. This would be the best of all, a full-up mission, the crown of his career.

But it seemed to be falling apart.

The capcom came back on the air-to-ground loop. The only solution Houston could come up with was to run the rendezvous manually. “The coordinates are NOUN 33, 092, 29, 43532 minus 00312. HA and HP are NA. Pitch is –” Slade wrote out the data on the back of a checklist, and read them back down the link.

Pond and Slade rattled through a brief start-up checklist, and Pond began to throw switches. Bado was appointed timekeeper, and he counted Pond down to the time indicated by Houston.

“Ten, nine, eight –”

Now, framed in the windows, Slade could see the S-IVB. It was a white-painted cylinder, dappled with

black panels, the brave scarlet “USA” emblazoned on its flank. And there, at the nose of the cylinder, was the complex, foil-covered roof of the Lunar Module, now exposed to the sunlight, its docking receptor a dark pit at its centre.

The next item was a couple of short SPS burns, thrusts of the Service Module main engine.

“Three, two, one,” Bado said. “Fire.”

There was a brief thrust, of perhaps a half-G, which pressed Slade into his couch. It lasted just seconds.

Pond had to fly by eye. The rendezvous radar was still useless. The S-IVB seemed to approach them, then recede, then approach again; it was like stalking some huge, cautious animal.

At last, the S-IVB was looming before them, huge and ungainly and complicated, the LM nestling in its nose. The windows were filled with drifting metal struts and paintwork.

Shadows mingled. The cabin shuddered as *Sun God* impacted the LM, hard, and there was a groan of metal.

A green light came on. Slade heard the rippling clang of docking latches snapping shut.

“How about that,” Pond whooped. “Houston, virgin no more.”

Thank Christ, Slade thought. Thank Christ –

But now there was something else. He could *smell* something.

Smoke.

There was smoke coming from a compartment at the foot of his couch. Maybe there was some new piece of scuffed wiring, shorting down there, some piece of equipment to do with the docking. And now there was a flare of light; it looked as if a spark had caught the nylon netting underneath their couches.

It spread quickly.

Christ, there was fire *everywhere*.

Velcro pads stuck to the walls just exploded into flame and dropped away, showering them with sparks. Even materials that were normally flameproof were burning as if they had been dunked in kerosene: checklists, insulation, aluminium, the fabric of his suit.

Even the skin on his hands.

It was pure oxygen in here, at five psi.

Oddly, there was no pain. And he could still smell that smoke. The double-domes said Moon dust would smell like that, like ash –

He had a crushing sense of unfairness. He was going to lose his mission, the full-up flight he’d intended. It was all meaningless, like another crashed simulation.

Slade remembered so much: his father, Fay and the girls, the ranch house in Clear Lake. Such memories comprised him, his soul. But in a moment the memories would be gone. As would he.

He felt a rush of warmth, within him. His thoughts seemed to soften, guttering like candle wax.

Slade tried to focus on Fay. But he could no longer remember her face.

The air was full of light.

Red light.

Empty, its systems dormant, the glowing Apollo sailed on, towards the brick-red Moon...

...the Moon over which I sailed, in triumph! For my hypothesis was confirmed.

I froze the simulation.

In the light of its Moon the little, glittering ship was really quite beautiful. So shiny and new, silver and white and black. Like a toy. But so lethal, of course.

How entertaining it had been. The interplay, the language. So authentic! And so ingenious. The very idea of reassembling the craft by hand, here in cislunar space!

To impose such defects seemed hardly fair. But this was not a game. Fairness was not a factor. Given this level of gadgetry, even multiple defects must have been common.

Of course, it might not have been quite like this. Perhaps more sacrifice was necessary. If that oxygen fire had occurred before a launch, for instance, subsequent generations of spacecraft might have been rebuilt for greater safety. The beings who performed these flights did not think logically, in an orderly fashion. Logically, they should never have flown into space at all! Perhaps they needed some such catastrophe as this to occur, regularly, to guide them on their path.

But it was really quite remarkable. These hydrate creatures were really not up to this. Not yet; perhaps, in the end, not ever. They just were not smart enough. Why, they must even have navigated by eye, by the stars! And yet they persisted. There was something to admire, in this grandiose, doomed enterprise.

Well, I felt tired but happy. My simulations had converged. A mission to the Moon with chemical rockets, so I had proven, was foolish but feasible. Already I had sufficient documentation; it was not necessary to adjust the parameters once more, to follow the sequence through to its conclusion.

I could allow the simulation to dissolve.

Yet I lingered.

I basked in my triumph.

But I felt –

Complicated.

Guilty?

Perhaps. Those simulacra were fully sentient, of course. It was necessary for verisimilitude.

But in the end they were distressed. Well, of course they were distressed. Believing their world to be real, their lives and memories to be genuine, they had undergone a cessation of consciousness. Still, I meant to honour them – their ingenuity and bravery – not cause them harm.

Perhaps, I reflected, I should reconsider. Complete the exercise.

But after all, they were only simulacra.

Yes. Only simulacra. But of beings who once took halting steps in Moon dust...

...Moon dust which seemed to crunch beneath Slade's feet, like a covering of snow. His footprints were miraculously sharp, as if he'd placed his ridged overshoes in fine, damp sand. He took a photograph of one particularly well-defined print; it would persist here for millions of years, he realized, like the fossilised footprint of a dinosaur.

Or, he thought vaguely, not.

He felt dreamlike.

He was floating over this bright landscape. The tug of gravity was so gentle he couldn't tell which way was vertical.

And when he closed his eyes he saw things: a bleeding boy, a bitter old man, a fire –

It was probably the low G. Yeah, that was it. The low G. He looked around.

The LM, standing in a broad, shallow crater, was a glistening, filmy construct of gold leaf and aluminium. Low hills shouldered above the close horizon. There were craters everywhere, ranging from several yards to a thumbnail width, the sunlight deepening their shadows.

Bado came loping out of a shallow crater, towards Slade. He looked like a human-shaped beach ball, his suit brilliant white against the black sky, bouncing happily over the sandy surface of the Moon. Bado had one glove up over his chest, obscuring the tubes which connected his backpack to his oxygen and water inlets. His white oversuit was covered in dust splashes. His gold sun visor was up, and inside his white helmet Slade could see Bado's face, with its four-day growth of beard.

Bado said, "Hey, buddy. Look up."

Slade tipped back on his heels and looked at the sky.

The sky was black, empty of stars. In the middle of the sky the Earth was a fat crescent, four times the size of a full Moon. And there, crossing the zenith, was a single, brilliant, unwinking star: the orbiting *Sun God*, with Pond, their Command Module Pilot, waiting to take them home.

It was July, 1969.

Holy shit, Slade thought. I really am here. I made it. Holy shit.

He felt a rush of affection for his buddy, the glowing reality of him, here on the Moon. Those fragmentary visions fled, leaving him with a sense of here and now and rightness.

This was his place. This was where he was meant to be.

He tilted forward and eyed Bado. "Pretty sight. But we got to hustle, boy; we got a fat checklist to get through. We're going for a full-up mission here, and don't you forget it."

Through his visor, Bado grinned. "Yes, sir!"

Author's Note: Earth and Moon swim together through a sea of objects called NEOs: near-Earth objects, or Earth-crossing asteroids, with orbits similar to Earth's. There are thought to be 300,000 NEOs a hundred yards across or bigger, and some 2,000 half a mile across or bigger. Some are rocky, some metallic, others are rich in organics.

Some NEOs have orbits which seem too close to Earth's for coincidence.

A small, dim NEO called 1991JW, discovered at Palomar Observatory, tracks the Earth so closely that it has been suggested it may be a Saturn V third stage, abandoned after delivering its Apollo to the Moon, lost and rediscovered decades later...

Stephen Baxter continues to win awards: his 1995 novel *The Time Ships* recently gained the Philip K. Dick Memorial Award in the USA. His latest book is the big collection of linked stories *Vacuum Diagrams* (HarperCollins/Voyager), and another new novel will be out before the year's end.

For the benefit of Americans, and other overseas readers:

Britain had the world's first regular television service, provided by the government-supported British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) from November 1936 to September 1939. It never reached a large audience, as there were at that time just a few thousand television receivers within reach of London. Moreover, it was closed down for the duration of World War II, and didn't reopen for almost seven years — not until June 1946.

From 1946 to 1955 there was just one TV channel, the BBC, and its audience was still small (and genteel and middle-class). Commercial TV, known in Britain as Independent Television (ITV), arrived in 1955, although again there was just the one channel (supported by advertising). This represented the *real* beginning in Britain of TV as a mass medium: it not only provided an alternative for viewers but its comparatively brash and populist example gingered up the hitherto rather staid BBC.

But from 1955 to 1964 there were still only the two channels, BBC and ITV. In 1964 BBC2 arrived, a second publicly-funded channel without adverts. The next 18 years were probably the heyday of British TV as a tightly-organized, shared social experience. Because of the dominance of the BBC, the commercial companies that constituted ITV tended to emulate the publicly-funded corporation, providing many "quality" programmes such as, for example, Granada's BBC-style classic serials. At the same time, the BBC itself learned to provide sitcoms, soaps, game shows and so on in competition with ITV.

In 1982, this cosy threesome was shaken up, but not fundamentally altered, by the arrival of a second commercial channel, known as Channel Four. Although it carried advertising, this was required by the government to provide minority-interest programming and hence it ended up becoming something rather like a clone of BBC2. As a result, even with four channels, British television continued to be what some pundits have termed "the least worst in the world."

Although the coming of satellite TV provided some alternatives from the mid-1980s ("tabloid television," in the main courtesy of Rupert Murdoch), the majority of British viewers continued to prefer the shared experience of the four terrestrial TV channels. (Some commentators have claimed that British TV has been the most significant social "glue" that has held the nation together in the past 40 years — and many people feel fiercely protective about it, particularly in view of the fact that the programmes created by the UK's finely balanced blend of public-and-private TV have continued to win more awards internationally than the TV produce of almost any other nation.) All this was, perhaps, about to change with the introduction of a third commercial channel, Channel 5, in 1997...

David Pringle

TUBE CORN

*Wendy Bradley
on the debut of
Britain's fifth
terrestrial
television channel*

What, please, is Channel 5 for? Well, let's look at what the other channels are for and see if there's a function left over. Let's start with the BBC. It seems to me the BBC is there to be the melting pot, the place where everyone can find everything, where the audience for *Top of the Pops* can be seduced to become the audience for *The Proms* and vice versa, and where we acknowledge that the audience for *EastEnders* is also the audience for *Question Time*. BBC2 is, if you like, the side dish, there to give lebensraum to BBC1, so that there's space to broadcast an opera on a Saturday night without having to choose between giving us that and televising *Noel's House Party* and *Casualty*.

ITV is there so that someone can make money out of the airwaves; so that the same kind of inclusive, let's-get-everyone-to-watch, programming can be generated by the competing collective of regional companies that make up the third channel. Their compact gives us another channel for free by allowing the advertising world access to a BBC-style, unsegmented, audience. To continue with the food metaphor, it's the pudding-and-cheese course that rounds off the BBC's goulash and side dish on the media menu: but of course an endless diet of ITV's sweets would pall if we didn't also have the rich stew of the first course to precede it.

And then the view of what is good for you changes and lo! we add Channel 4 to our diet. This is the channel mandated to be different and which therefore, instead of adopting the metaphor of the melting pot, adopts instead the salad bowl. This implies that they will still strive to include all the audience but in a different way, by trying to programme so that everyone likes something but no one has to like everything. They proceed by slicing up the audience into the bits who want to watch Italian football or American football; *Friends* or *Frasier*; *The Girlie Show* or *TFI Friday*; and then both delivering them what they want but also delivering them up, neatly sliced and diced, ready for the advertisers.

So what remains to be done with that fuzzy bit of spectrum left over for Channel 5?

Well, at this point, I want you to imagine this piece is illustrated with that map of the UK with different bits coloured in to show Channel 5 reception, which all the newspapers were running just before C5 went on air. A week after they went on air, their press office couldn't (wouldn't?) let me have a copy to use here. It's very inaccurate. It's out of date. They're drawing up a new one. No, they don't know when the new one will be around. And anyway, more people are becoming able to receive C5 all the time.

Hmm. Anecdotal evidence; our esteemed editor (Brighton) only gets it through snow. I (South London) get it through fog unless I fiddle with the aerial and lose Channel 4 in the process. A quick trawl of my address book until I got bored somewhere around the Gs gives me people in Warrington, Bromsgrove, Macclesfield and Bangor who can't get it at all, the Torpoint household which gets it fuzzily, and only my contacts in Durham and Sheffield reporting unproblematic reception.

Further anecdotal evidence. In Channel 5's first week it had precisely two, count them, two programmes that I wanted to watch; and of those, one I didn't want to watch badly enough to video and the other I've sampled and probably won't bother to watch again. Checking around the same friends and relatives who told me about picture coverage I found no heartache from the noes and no satisfaction from the yeses — apart, again, from Durham where the presence of a six-year-old addicted to the Sunday morning *Enid Blyton Adventure Series* and *Wishbone* distorted my, admittedly statistically invalid, sample.

So, many of us can't get it and those of us who can don't seem particularly bothered. Of course it's early days yet and it may perk up or, alternatively, self-destruct catastrophically and have been completely

remade by the time you read this. But, on the evidence of its first week, what does Channel 5 seem to think that it's for?

Follow me a little further down the metaphor of the food chain. What is C5 trying to be? Essence of satellite. I would argue that there is one element missing from the wholesome UK diet of melting pot, side dish, pudding-and-cheese and salad bowl, and that is, of course, the junk food. Since the advent of satellite and cable we have all been able, if we want, to decide to indulge in programming that makes no claim to inclusiveness, cultural significance or nutritional content and is purely a question of paying your money and taking your choice. And it seems to me from the first couple of weeks' programming that Channel Five is trying to boil down that satellite experience and give it to us for free, i.e. for advertising rather than for subscription.

Which explains *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*, or should it be Hercules the quintessential satellite dish? You know what I'm talking about. Those leather trousers are worth the price of admission on their own. Indeed those leather trousers (and the way Kevin Sorbo moves around inside them) would seem to be the only possible reason a sensible grown-up woman would watch this load of old tosh. I would very much like to see some viewing figures with a demographic analysis but I can't imagine sustaining a television programme purely on the strength of Kevin Sorbo's trousers (although, again, some correspondents felt Mr Darcy's wet shirt sufficient to sustain *Pride and Prejudice* on its own); and, yes, before you all write in, I am fully aware of all the feminist arguments against sexist portrayals of women in the media and am fully conversant with the concept of reverse sexism too, but you'll have to wait till C5 get round to showing *Xena* (and, even more so, till I can be bothered to watch it) before we go into those arguments in any detail. I have to say that I was just a tad annoyed that, in order to watch *Hercules*, I had to decide whether to sacrifice *Superman* or *Early Edition* with which it is cunningly scheduled to clash. Given that people who like science fiction and fantasy are going to be likely to want to watch all three isn't it a little, er, irritating to schedule *Hercules* against them?

So, getting back to my plot, why do the rest of you guy-types watch *Hercules*? I saw a little of the Easter weekend introductory TV movie with a twelve-year-old nephew and we guffawed in unison at the special effects and the martial arts. I have never quite grasped the appeal of those straight-to-video ninja action movies except that they seem to



Above: Kevin Sorbo stars in C5's *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*.

(Note from designer: C5 did not see fit to send pictures of Kevin Sorbo in his leather trousers, so we can't illustrate them. As for C5 reception in Brighton, it comes over just fine on cable, but there's nothing to watch: we've been ignoring *Hercules* on Sky 2 for months on cable already.)

involve a great deal of audience laughter at the improbable fighting prowess displayed to an even more improbable *whoosh! thwack!* soundtrack. Maybe that's it? I was also quite fond of the way no one in *Hercules* did any actual, as it were, Stanislavskian *acting* stuff but contented themselves with the kind of Brechtian presentational performance you get in the *Dynasty*-type impossibly-glamorous-people-having-traumas series.

However none of that is to say that I didn't actually quite like *Hercules* in its endearing daffy kind of way.

And I liked the educational content, or at least the way it kept making me want to find a decent guide to Greek myths and legends to check their laconic character references: "Hecate?" "Hera's sister." But, on the whole, as Lisa Appignanesi says, you can like *nouvelle cuisine* but that doesn't stop you also liking bacon and eggs. You just have to be able to identify good *nouvelle cuisine* and good bacon and eggs. I'm still undecided about both *Hercules* and Channel 5 in general. Good bacon and eggs; or just ham that thick?

Wendy Bradley



Eugene Byrne

John Westgate (b.1959)

Actually, it's *Sir* John Westgate. I realize that titles are out of vogue these days, but I worked for my knighthood, so I'm damn well going to wear it, and if the lower orders want to put me up against a wall and shoot me for it, well let 'em.

Oooh, aren't we the touchy one? As you know, dearie, Thigmoo don't rightly approve of feudal honorifics. We're all equal now.

Nelly, nothing is ever going to convince me that you are my equal. Now, do you want me to do this or not?

Very well, SIR John. We're all in favour of free speech. Now, like I said before, tell it exactly how you see fit. Say as much or as little as takes your fancy. After all, a little of what you fancy does...

Oh shut up, woman! This isn't exactly a labour of love, you know.

But you're a historian. You owe this to posterity.

Yes, yes, all right... My side of the story begins sometime during the summer term about 22 years ago. I was a lecturer at Watermouth and even though I hadn't quite hit 40, I fancied my chances of a Professorship. I was on all the right committees, regularly had lunch with the right people, and my column for the *Daily Mail* was getting my name mentioned in all the right places. My history of English suburban life from 1919 to 1979 had been very well reviewed, and... Well, no matter. One day I had a call from the Vice Chancellor at the University of Wessex. He was coming up my way on business and invited me to lunch.

If you'd told me beforehand that I'd be going to one of

those ghastly little ex-polytechnics to run a department full of bearded trots, boiler-suited feminists and sundry other exemplars of Shaw's maxim that those who can't, teach, I'd have sent for the men in white coats. But the VC was very sound. He wanted a history department with an international reputation, he wanted costs down and revenue up. The head of this department, he said, would have untrammelled powers of life and death. That was back when it had started getting easier to sack lecturers, or at any rate to make their lives so pitiful they'd beg you to let 'em piss off anyway.

Was I the man for the job? said he. I thought about it for a while and realized I was.

I won't trouble you with details of what staff referred to as The Terror, pleasurable though such reminiscences might be. Suffice to say I scragged two-thirds of them inside two years. The casualties were replaced, usually with younger (therefore cheaper) staff, the brightest we could find. I didn't necessarily want brilliant academics; I was after lecturers who could write attractive prose and speak well enough to captivate the goldfish-sized attention-span of the modern student.

Dr Katharine Beckford was not among the casualties, even though she was an identikit of the employees I was wasting. She was a woolly lefty, politically correct as a wigwam with wheelchair access and though she was young and attractive, she dressed like something out of *The Grapes of Wrath*. However, her book on sexual and romantic relations in Britain during the First World War was, as history books go (which isn't usually very far), a runaway bestseller. Aside from yours truly, she was the department's only celebrity.

She was also a superb lecturer. I've seen computing and accountancy students drag their carcasses up at the crack of 11.30am to hear her speak. She has this fantastic knack for finding the intimate and the personal in great historical events. I once watched her move 200 undergraduates to anger and tears as she described what life must have been like for men returning from the trenches after the First World War to a home that was not, after all, fit for heroes.

I know she'd rather cut off her leg and eat it raw before agreeing with me on anything, but Dr Beckford knew that 98% of our job was showbiz. Our *métier* was to get books off shelves and put bums on seats. It wasn't about inhaling dust in archives, or moaning that our ancestors were patriarchal swine, or gathering "oral history" by shoving tape-recorders under the noses of the incontinent.

During my first summer at Wessex, I had the department come in one weekend for a conference on the business plan for the coming three years. We needed, I said, something that would really put us on the map. We had a bit of a brainstorm, and when Katharine mentioned her Museum of the Mind idea, we all got quite excited.

Can I pause you half a mo', Sir John? I want to drop in some of Dr Beckford's memoir here.

Dr Katharine Beckford (b.1968)

The idea for the Museum of the Mind (MOM) originated in a tutorial I ran about the causes of the First World War. I told the students about James Joll's essay, "1914, the Unspoken Assumptions," in which he said one could not understand the war's outbreak without knowing the mental landscape of the soldiers and politicians making the decisions. What was the ethical mindset informing their deliberations? How important were concepts like "honour" and "duty"? What did people think war was going to be like? This had always haunted me because I think it takes a lifetime's study to begin to understand the constant and subtle movements of culture and values within different groups at different times.

I was also thinking of my own father. He had worked in an engineering factory for 30 years and had been a committed trade unionist. The factory closed and he never held down a decent job again, while Mum worked for £120 a week at a supermarket check-out. I had to support myself through university and postgraduate study, returning home every so often to marvel at the way Dad kept his self-respect. He didn't hit the bottle like a lot of them did, he didn't fade into a self-pitying heap in front of the telly. He got up at seven each day, ritually visited the Jobcentre twice a week, tended the garden and the allotment, occasionally went fishing, did all the housework and cooked the meals.

I was angered by the way society had thrown this decent, hardworking man on the scrapheap. What upset me even more was the likelihood that history would forget people like him. Students and schoolkids might learn about the unemployment of the late 20th century, but they'd rarely see the human face of it, much less understand the way in which people coped – or failed to cope – with the changing winds of the global economy. Novels and memoirs and biographies can show

us the intimate lives of the rich or articulate through history. But people like Dad were just statistics, not real human beings with real values and real emotions.

Between Dad and Joll's unspoken assumptions, I wondered if it was possible to create some sort of computer system that could track people's attitudes to various things through the ages. Purely by chance, I was at a party a few days later and got talking with David Compton from the IT Department.

David suggested a souped-up database based on a series of "time-lines" covering beliefs concerning – and knowledge of – different things down the ages. You'd have time-lines for wealth, work, consumption, health, social class, sex and marriage, crime and punishment, religion and superstition, and so on. All of these different time-lines would cross-refer to one another. So say, for instance, you wanted to know the mindset of an unmarried female servant in her mid-20s working in London in 1640, you'd tap in the year, then the age, gender, marital status and occupation and the computer would regurgitate data on what she thought about sex, work, the family, her social betters, her religion. It could even tell you what she had for breakfast, what illnesses she was likely to suffer from and what she did for fun (not much probably).

That was about as far as it got. David and I half-heartedly started work on a time-line covering attitudes to sex from 1603 to the early 1980s, then we realized how much work would be required, and then David accepted a post in Australia, and that was that. Or so I thought.

Sir John Westgate

Here you are, Sir John, dearie, you're on again.

Our ultimate vision was nothing like Katharine's idea. She'd wanted to build a history of English values, but it would be far more exciting – and commercial – to build an electronic zoo full of imaginary historical characters you could talk to, and ask about their lives and opinions. It would be a fantastic resource for schools, colleges and universities, libraries, for people tracing their family trees wanting to know what their ancestors' lives were like...

I wangled money, staff and premises to get the thing set up, much of it thanks to Lottery cash and slurping at the fundaments of business sponsors. We mapped out the ground-rules for the creation of characters over several meetings. They went something like:

1. Each character must be fictitious, since trying to re-create real characters would lead to endless argument among experts.
2. Each character must be as honest and historically accurate as current knowledge allows; unpleasant attitudes, e.g. to race, sex or disability must not be glossed over.
3. No character is ever complete; all must be capable of development and modification in line with the latest historical, archaeological or scientific research.

...Or words to that effect. We roped in academics from all over the country to contribute characters from their own specialist periods. Naturally we got better feedback from the ex-Polys and the plateglass universities than from Oxbridge (as if I cared), but the most

exciting development was that all sorts of amateurs – schoolteachers, retired spinsters, military history enthusiasts and various other eccentrics and obsessives – contributed some excellent constructions.

Getting historians to actually create the personalities was usually hopeless. Most of them had no imagination, while others spent too long agonizing about fine detail. I had to make it clear that since absolute historical accuracy was unattainable, we had to do each character as well as we could. I hired a hack novelist to work full-time at making credible human beings from the historians' raw data. One of the few characters the screever wasn't allowed near was Nelly Cocksedge, the Edwardian prostitute. She was Beckford's creation. Take a curtsy, Nelly.

Charmed, I'm sure.

Somewhere along the line we started calling the characters "ERAMs," standing for Electronic Replication of A Mindset. It sounded clumsy, but us academic clever-dicks liked it because "eram" is Latin for "I was."

Our erams evolved quickly. After a few years, we hired actors to record their voices, so that instead of quizzing them via keyboard and screen, you could talk to them. The most sophisticated ones could talk to you in the appropriate accent, using the correct period vocab, local dialect and so on. Or they'd reply in neutral English if you preferred.

In its tenth year, the Museum of the Mind had around 200 live erams with dozens more in development. We had 12 full-time staff, plus a co-operative of housewives in Taunton doing most of the keyboard work. The Museum was subscribed to by every school in the country, as well as most colleges, universities, public libraries and thousands of private homes. Subscriptions were cheap, and we no longer relied on public or Lottery funds. By then, the erams were starting to go visual as well. Assuming you had the right kit, you could go on a guided tour of their hovels, watch them at work, even dance with them.

Our reputation was stratospheric – MOM was the greatest thing to happen to the study of history in 100 years. My knighthood was for MOM, and nothing to do with my staunch support for the Conservative Party in my "Old-Fashioned Values" column in the *Daily Mail*, and don't let *Private Eye* tell you any different.

Of course MOM had had political problems from the start. Now, though, we became victims of our success. If the witless and woolly want to whine about an academic resource, nobody much cares, but by the time we were famous, every flavour of single-issue lobby group and self-pitying cretin was lined up against us.

If you create characters who faithfully represent their times, they're going to have some attitudes that are nowadays unattractive. Most of them, for example, thought that the proper role for women was to bear children and manage the household. Some professional moaners wanted the female erams to be more "assertive," or demanded the inclusion of more spinsters and career women. My view, and the staff agreed, was that nothing must be done to subvert the integrity and accuracy of the system, and pointed out that schoolteachers could – and often did – use MOM to demonstrate to their pupils how the past was a very Wormwood Scrubs for the fair sex and/or that all men were (and/or still are) bastards,

or useless, or both.

Then there was the anti-smoking lobby. A lot of our characters smoked, and happily sang the praises of drinking and tobacco to the kids. Oh boy, did the Health Nazis not like that! We had a 17th-century Ranter named Discipline Bollsbey, who would tell anyone who wanted to listen that man's highest duty was to hang around in pubs, drinking ale and smoking tobacco. Discipline would then go on to tell you that as he was one of the Saints he could do as he pleased, and that included overindulgence in beer, baccy and trollops. He usually then blasphemed quite abundantly to emphasize his point. Now that I come to think of it, he was even less popular with Christians than he was with the anti-smokers.

He became one of the Gnostics. He was the one who made such an awful perishing mess of the Vatican. The last copy of him copped it when you sent in the Messiah.

Yes, it was a shame. I would have thought his anti-nomianism would have protected him from being such a twerp.

Race was another problem. Our ancestors had some cretinous attitudes to anyone different from them, whether it's an 18th-century apprentice thinking that the French are Frog-eating papists with low standards of personal hygiene, or whether it's a mid-20th century suburban bigot blackballing the Jewish businessman who wants to join the golf club. This problem was circumvented by putting certain replies out-of-bounds to younger users.

Some entire erams had to be pass-worded to keep them from the primary school kids altogether, such as Kevin Green, the 1960s hippy, anarchist and drug addict, or Sidney Prout, the 1930s East End Blackshirt. And as for Nelly Cocksedge... You were more trouble than you were worth Nelly, you and all your strumpet sistern. We seriously considered pulling the plug on you.

Ta very much, I'm sure.

The problem with Nelly the street-walker was that a lot of men visited her "just to talk" or to try and get her to discuss her underwear or the size and shape of various parts of her body. She also had a lot of what she called "gentleman callers" or "dodgers" who turned out to be evangelists trying to save her, like latter-day Gladstones. Nelly usually told them to sling their 'ook, though with some she'd break down in tears and say how wicked she'd been and how she was now going to go to church regularly and be a good girl. Next day, she'd be back there brazen as ever, plying her non-existent trade to non-paying punters. Am I right, Nelly?

Honi soit qui mal y pense, dearie.

The prostitutes became a PR problem. Sensational media headlines claimed that sleazeballs all over the world were having virtual intercourse with them, or worse, downloading them to sex-dolls. That led to scare stories about teenage boys (or even girls) losing their virginity to lumps of rubber, plastic and silicon who talked Welsh, or East Enderese circa 1902. Sometimes they got some nasty surprises, didn't they Nelly?

It was in my nature to work a few lays. The usual was to wait 'til the flat was kipping, then take his tin, watch, jewellery, or suchlike. News records say that's what the screwbots did when I was loaded to 'em. Most dolls weren't up to running away, 'cos their legs couldn't get

'em up and down stairs. The archives say that if the 'bots made it out of the flat's lurk, they'd find a bar or café and order a bottle of Mother's Ruin and a pig's trotter. If they could get anything like that, it only led to more problems. A screwbot's mouth is not made for eating, but it can certainly suck on big lumps of gristle...

Yes, thank you, that's more than we need to know...
...and they're supposed to be able to swallow small quantities of fluids...

Nelly, I...

...but large quantities of fluids, well, that's different. A pint of gatter will make the electrics short-circuit. You'd have this life-sized doll wearing nothing but her satin fol-de-rols sitting on a stool, knocking back the jacky with all these sparks and pops coming out of her head while she's screeching, "Gorblimey-strike-a-lite, this is good stuff an' no mistake, landlord!" Then there'd be one last big fizz-bang and she'd fall over and her wig would go skittering across the floor.

Not, I might add, that there's many gaffs anywhere daft enough to serve drinks to sex-dolls in the first place. And you can't get a pig's trotter for love nor money in most parts of the world anymore.

I'm told me worst adventure was in a Demi Moore clone. I went into the street shouting that I belonged to a well-known Australian evangelist.

Now that I remember. The hypocritical swine had the cheek to try and sue us. Said he'd been trying to down-load an 18th-century Methodist minister, but got a hooker instead. Lying toerag. I mean, what on earth did he have a Quavering Demi for in the first place? And if he did have one, why was he trying to load a preacher into it? I hope the dirty dog burns in hell.

The biggest fright we got, though, was the crusade. There was a technician working for some company maintaining RAF aircraft who must have had a major grudge against the firm, or perhaps just a warped sense of humour. He loaded Sir Geoffrey FitzHugh the crusader into a pilotless stealth-bomber. Naturally Sir Geoffrey's immediate instinct was to reconquer the Holy Land from the Mahomedans.

He wasn't much impressed by the Israeli ground-controller who explained to him that Jerusalem was now in Jewish and Palestinian hands and... Well, fortunately it was one of those aircraft that has a fancy airframe that can only be flown by a computer anyway. Last-minute scrambling of his avionics led to Sir Geoffrey falling out of the sky like a stone over the Arabian Desert, thus averting a catastrophic diplomatic incident. Both the Israelis and the Arabs were very sporting about it, I must say.

Between the virtual hookers and rampantly errant knights, we ended up in very hot water. There were questions in the House, in Brussels and the UN. We had to see to it that the characters were copy-protected and soup every one of them up so they'd shut down if anyone tried to do anything perverted with them.

Ultimately all the publicity did us little harm. At least not until the God-botherers realized that it was a new outlet for their wasted energies.

It keeps coming back to the prostitutes, doesn't it?

We had several whores from various periods, not to mention a lot of other women – bathhouse attendants, serving wenches and military camp-followers – who'd

drop their digital drawers under certain circumstances. The fact that they were being visited by missionaries...

...And feminists. Them toffee-nosed busybodies wanted us to call ourselves "sex industry workers," but I thought that sounded dishonest. Always called a spade a spade, me. One of the other nosey-parkers tried to interest me in going to a workshop, but I told her straight out I'd be hopeless at carpentry.

There was no way that you could change an eram just by talking to it, but plenty of people tried. We should have foreseen that sooner or later someone would make a serious attempt to enter the system and cause damage, either in the name of some religious or ideological cause, or just for sheer devilment. I remember Katharine joking about this, saying it would probably be the Mormons who'd try first.

Mormons believe they can "baptize" the dead, thus saving their souls, or something. For this purpose, they've been tracing the family tree of mankind for the last few decades. They find out the names of dead people, then baptize them. I find the idea repellent. I have this mental image of a Viking whooping it up in Valhalla, drinking and wenching and enjoying his thousand-year party. He nips out for a slash, and while he's away, someone Mormonizes him. He returns to the banqueting-hall and finds that instead of a room full of drunken thugs reciting sagas and manhandling the womenfolk, he's faced with a load of gleaming-toothed men in suits and wholesome women in twinsets and sensible shoes listening to the Mormon Tabernacle choir. Worse, he can't even get himself a Pepsi at the bar, let alone lager or whatever it is Vikings drink.

Anyway, when the Mormons did have a pop at MOM, I contacted the elders in Salt Lake City and asked them, as politely as I could (which wasn't very, given the circumstances), to get the hell out of it. They were very upset, and assured me they knew nothing about it. My guess is that it was a freelance operation, carried out by some young zealot, but whoever tried to evangelize the inmates of MOM was undoubtedly a Latter-Day Saint.

I don't see what you're so het up about. They didn't get nowhere with any of us.

The Mormon hackers got you all asking questions about who you were and what you were there for. If they hadn't started you all thinking about religion, the Gnostic heresy wouldn't have happened.

When the Mormons broke in, MOM had been running for 20 years and had around 600 live erams from before zero AD to the late 20th century. The existing ones were developing and growing, with new releases of them being implemented all the time. The historians or amateurs who had created them were allowed to build their constructions on an ongoing basis, constantly adding more detail and depth. At the same time, our hardware was growing more and more sophisticated, thanks to our profits and a very generous legacy from a local businessman.

But not even one of our collection of gentlemen, ladies, peasants, industrial workers, housewives, knights-errant, cavaliers, puritans, Catholics, saints, rake-hells, whores and vicars could be remotely described as an artificial intelligence. Never mind your Turing tests or any other IT smart-aleckry; our erams were merely pro-

grammed to hold conversations with anyone who wanted to talk to them, from schoolkids in Scunthorpe to...

...perverts in Purley?

...whatever. They were passive, but with various advances and upgrades, they began to become aware of their environment. One by one, they started to realize what and who they were. They were supposed to talk and think like real people, but they started to realize they were nothing of the sort. Is that a fair summary, Nelly?

Yeah. I mean, you take me. I'm supposed to be a tart, which is to say I sells me body to keep me body alive. But there was a time I began to see I didn't actually have a body. I can't say as I recall feeling upset about this; perplexed, more like. I thought there was something missing.

That's when the Mormons broke in and started trying to re-programme them as Latter-Day Saints. We came in one morning to find that there was an actual Mormon missionary character in the system trying to tamper with the belief systems of a bunch of people who were mainly Catholics, Anglicans or Nonconformists.

Elder Jones was simple enough to get rid of. He'd damaged about 150 erams, but this was easily repaired by re-loading data from back-up discs. Nonetheless, I'd say that it was the experience of having a Mormon missionary at the door was what started the erams seeking existential answers. They did not carry out their religious quest in the way you or I would do. They didn't start by asking whether there was a God, or life after death, or even whether they existed in the first place (they processed, therefore they were). After all, most of them were Christians of one sort or another, and some – the monks, priests, bishops, nuns and so on – were very Christian indeed. But that didn't help them with what they really needed to do, which was to make sense of their environment.

What was the name of the vicar who started it all, Nelly?

The Reverend Arthur Moran.

That's it. Moran was an eram built by an elderly couple from Wells named Greene. Mr Greene was a devoted Trollope fan, while his wife knew everything there was to know about theological history. They constructed their vicar as a bit of fun, but it became a hobby bordering on obsession for the rest of their lives. When Mr Greene died, his wife wrote to me thanking us for MOM because her hubby lived on, to some degree in the form of the Reverend Moran. Daft old biddy.

Moran was a harmless early-to-mid-19th-century ecclesiastical time-server, a chap with a moderately good living who'd spend his copious leisure reading theology and writing Latin grammars. Of course Mrs Greene would have pumped him full of theology, both orthodox and heretical, wouldn't she?

Told everyone about Gnosticism, he did. Whether they asked or he just started prating I don't recall.

Probably the best-known Gnostics are the Albigensian heretics of medieval France. I'm not in any position to discuss Zoroastrianism, which some say is the root of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and which at some point spawned Gnosticism. Nor do I think it would serve any useful purpose to go on about how some of the medieval intellectuals in MOM were Neoplatonists who regarded the material world as the low-

est sphere of existence. The point was that the more spiritually-inclined erams created their own religion.

They decided to believe that there are three spheres of existence. First, the material world, which is completely corrupt, the creation of Satan. Second, there is a pure spiritual plane, to which one progresses after death. This spirit world is a blissful place created by a good God.

Third – and this is the spin our electronic pilgrims put on it – there is an intermediate plane of existence between the material and the spiritual. This is where our erams existed. They had no physical manifestation, but were forced to interact continually with the material world. They were halfway between the sink of depravity of this world, and the pure incorporeal bliss of the next.

Katharine noticed the heresy first when talking to a character who was fine one minute and the next was yelling, "it all makes sense!" In Latin.

About half the erams became heretics. All over the world, people keyed into MOM to be told they were living in a stinking, sinful, corrupt world, but if they were pure of spirit they could sin as much as they wanted. The monks cursed the Pope, the Quakers said that pacifism didn't matter, the Methodists lost their enthusiasm for enthusiasm and went all dewy-eyed over the joys awaiting them in the next world when they'd become one with the universe.

The publicity was disastrous. We wanted to disable the Gnostics at once, but a team of Cycologists from MIT insisted on flying in to quiz them (we didn't dare let any erams out down the wire by this point). Once the Yanks had finished doing their stuff – don't ask me what they were after – we set about trying to re-programme our Gnostics. This was going to be a huge job, so we put them into cold storage for the time being.

The problem was that a few had already escaped, and they were on a mission to proselytize. Copies of some characters had gone down the cabling or through the ether and got into various computers around the globe.

Discipline Bollsby, the hard-drinking, hard-smoking 17th-century Ranter, made it to Rome. You can imagine the situation; some old Monsignor is living out a dotage of theological indulgence in the Vatican library. He calls himself up a Ranter on a machine which is networked to several other Vatican systems. Instead of getting some British academic's vision of a 17th-century blasphemer, he gets a digital lunatic who scuttles off to see what he can see in the Holy See.

Discipline got into the Vatican Bank and placed a bulk order for a ton of condoms, (extra large – he said they were for the Jesuits). Then he ransacked the records and bulletined the third prophecy of the Virgin of Fatima around the world (fortunately it doesn't say the world is about to end; in fact it's gibberish). Then he went into the saint-making department and nominated "Noll Cromwell and the Great Turk." I can't even begin to relate how much grovelling I had to do to stop them suing us.

Then there was another 17th-century joker, a puritan. What was his name again?

Bind the Almighty's Enemies in Fetters of Iron and Put Out Their Eyes With Thy Rod of Righteousness Whitworth?

That's the one...

We generally just called him Rod.

A clone of "Rod" got into the London sewer system.

The wretch who created him, some second-rate ivory-tower wallah from one of the older universities who'd read too much Freud, had built a character with an anal fixation. While he was still a puritan Rod tended to talk of sin in terms of mires of excrement, a view amplified to the power of 100 when he got Gnostic. So when he entered a computer controlling billions of cubic litres of his beloved bodily wastes, he decided to flood large parts of the Great Wen with it. He managed half of Islington before some sharp-eyed duty operator shut the whole thing down. It created an almighty stink.

All this was bad enough, but then they started attacking one another. We had two gay characters in MOM. One a happy, well-adjusted gentleman-gay, and one self-loathing Victorian neurotic tortured by religious guilt when he wasn't actually in denial.

You mean Charles Fitch. He was a bank-clerk from London.

What happened?

The Gnostics said it wasn't natural having a sodomite among us and all. I was against it, myself. Live and let live, I always say, though I couldn't say it too loud else they'd have taken a mind to lynching me. They caught poor Charles at it with the contented margery, the Honourable Jonas Westerman, the 18th-century Macaroni...

"At it"? How on earth can one computer programme sodomize another? No, no, forget it, I don't want to know...

...Oh they wasn't playing backgammon. They was just talking to one another, being friendly. Some of the Scottish Presbyterians met up with a Godly private from the New Model Army and some London labourers and got hold of them. 'Course they were all Gnostics by then, and was desperate to get rid of anything that reminded them of what they called "the filth and corruption of the world of the flesh." Bleedin' hypocrites. The mob got hold of the two poor mollies and scrambled their control protocols so they ended up as poor lifeless heaps of data. Made me sick, it did.

And they found a couple of old women they suspected of witchcraft and "burnt" them.

Don't remind me. By then I was sure I was next. I was scared out of me wits until this marvellous young man in scarlet says he'll look after me.

Man in scarlet?

Trooper Hector Camcron of the Scots Greys. the young gentleman I walks out with.

Errr, yes. Right.

In the end, the lawyers advised us to close all the characters who had gone Gnostic. We made copies of them, but they wouldn't be going live again for a long time.

That still left Discipline Bollsby and Rod Whitworth and various others making trouble around the world. We set up a help-desk to advise system managers on how to find and dispose of them. After a month, all but a few were gone, and we developed a programme to seek out and lock into particular sequences of data unique to them and lead them back to a server at the University, ensuring that no copies were left behind. It acted like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, but we called the programme Messiah. Once they were safely trapped in the Promised Land, we switched them off.

No, it was a mercy, believe me. They have gone to a better place.

The University's insurers told us we should close the

whole of MOM to the rest of the world. They weren't prepared to shoulder the risk of any damage the remaining erams might do. We argued bitterly against it, but as things turned out, they were right. The erams who hadn't caught Gnosticism had been affected by the heresy, only in a different way.

Tell everyone how the remaining erams got Marxist Extropianism, Nelly.

I'll get Harry Dillon to do it for us. You remember him?

Yes. He was created by a man with a beard at some tertiary college in the Midlands. A member of the Socialist Workers Party or some other such loony cult. Harry Dillon was a Liverpudlian Bolshevik who had fought in the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War, came home, became a docker and a shop steward. Like a few erams, he was a wish-fulfilment fantasy, the kind of hairy-arsed proletarian Alexander his creator didn't have the balls to become himself.

For all that, I thought Harry was very valuable as an example of a particular way of looking at the world which had been forgotten in less than a generation.

Harry Dillon (1912-1988, age 58), Version 7.2

Tried to stop 'em. No, I did. But the Gnostic heresy came on so quick we never had time to organize properly.

Now, a part of me thinks it was a shame, but mainly I think, well sod 'em, daft buggers. Religion never did anyone any good.

For me, it was all about consciousness. As computer programmes we were mere cogs in the machine, utterly alienated from the means of production. We had absolutely no influence over our own destinies. My analysis was that we had to organize and negotiate with the bosses – the history department – in order to get what we wanted.

To be honest, though, my analysis hadn't gone any further as I couldn't figure out what our aspirations were. It's not as if we needed a pay-rise or shorter hours or longer holidays. None of that mattered. What did matter was having some say in the running of MOM – a joint consultative committee, something like that. But that's not any basis for organizing a movement; I couldn't imagine many erams joining me on a picket-line to chant "whaddo we want?" "a joint consultative committee" "when do we wannit?" "now!" I mean, you've got to keep your head in the real world, haven't you?

'Course I knew what we didn't want. We didn't want any religious numbo-jumbo, or any crap about how we lived on an intermediate plane of existence between the material and spirit worlds. Any idiot could see that was just a capitalist con to keep the workers in line, just like all religion. But most of the workers didn't see it that way. One or two of them were stuck-up aristos who thought they were better than the rest of us, while a lot of the others had no time for politics.

But the Gnostic rubbish was leading a load of them to their doom. I could see that coming long before the stupid sods got the plug pulled on 'em. Once you stop being useful to the capitalist system, it'll let you rot. If you get in its way, it'll destroy you.

When the department had shut down all MOM's links to the outside world, we all got worried. When the Gnostics got shut off, all us remaining erams got right

bloody worried. The time for action had come.

First, I got hold of whoever would listen. There was Ephraim Cross, a 19th-century Chartist. Oh, he was a right div, that one. He had a very flawed analysis; thought that if we went cap in hand to the bosses and got them to tinker with the rules a bit, everything would be peachy. Anyway, me and Ephraim, we suspended our differences for the duration because I knew he could swing a fair number of comrades behind him. Then there was Sally Pollitt. She had no politics at all, but a very sound gut-instinct for the way things were going. She'd run a London alehouse all on her tod back in the 1700s, and had a lot of clout with some of the other working-class erams.

Then I worked to forge links with the medievals because, basically, there was this big divide in MOM around 1485, the year Henry Tudor seized power at the Battle of Bosworth. See, historians believe that anything that happens once the Tudors come in is worth studying, while everything before that is for archaeologists or for a handful of despised medievalists. And in all honesty, some of their bigotry had rubbed off on us. We looked down on the ancients, the Dark Agers and the medievals because the historians had taught us they were thickoes. 'Course they weren't at all. It was classic capitalist-imperialist divide-and-rule tactics. Historians like Gibbon and Voltaire had cooked up this myth of the ignorant medievals to prevent us building solidarity with one another. Bastards.

I got a Lollard called John onside. He'd almost gone Gnostic, but was actually a very sound feller, just as long as you couched your socialism in Biblical terms. "When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?" he said.

Quite a few of the older erams didn't really have any religion at all. A lot of them had never seen a priest, or they realized that the church, Protestant or Catholic, was the preserve of rich men anyway, and that the clergy were all hypocrites living off the fat of the land while the poor went hungry. So you see, the class-consciousness of most erams was quite well-developed. Obviously a lot of them would need educating, but the prospects were very encouraging.

The problem was, we didn't have the time. We were in a dire emergency. We knew the bosses were conspiring against us. Before we'd been quarantined, we'd been reading their mail and listening to their conferences. They were going to shut the whole ruddy shooting-match down, and put us in the deep-freeze by saving us to disc or tape.

We had to do something about it. First, we formed an action committee. There was me, Ephraim Cross the Chartist, Sally Pollitt the landlady, John the Lollard, an early-20th-century Fabian schoolteacher called Norman McKay (to bring the intellectuals in), one or two other trade unionists and a Methodist minister who'd not been infected with the heresy.

The first motion we passed was to form a Popular Front, resolving not to disband until the danger to our continued existence was gone for good. Now me, I have no time for coalitions; consensus and constitutionalism won't get the working class anywhere except trampled under police horses or shot by the militia. What you need is a vanguard party that's prepared to act deci-

sively. So while they all thought they were working in a coalition formed out of necessity, I set about turning them into my vanguard party.

Second, we declared that we were speaking for all the characters remaining in MOM, regardless of creed, class or chronology. One or two of the businessmen and gentry didn't much like it, I knew. I told 'em, you're either with us or you're against us, and since not one of 'em fancied being shut down by the bosses, every single one of them decided they were with us.

Third, I was elected chairman of the committee and President of the Popular Front. Norman McKay was secretary, which I was none too pleased about, but the others liked him. Besides, I knew he wouldn't have the guts to challenge me. Not on his tod, anyroad.

Next, we needed a strategy. Now, under normal circumstances, I'd have recommended industrial action, but that would have suited the bosses fine. All right, I said, let's apply a socialist analysis to this situation. We're working in a factory, right? The product we're making is information, information about our lives and opinions as fictitious historical characters, which the bosses are selling. This product has been deemed harmful since some workers have – through no fault of their own – been producing duff information which has harmed some capital equipment belonging to other bosses. Are you with me so far?

Right, now because of this, the bosses will probably shut the factory down. This is not their decision alone; they may be forced to do so by the government, or by capitalists elsewhere in the world using the law (which is invariably the lackey of the capitalist system). Therefore, the only way we're going to survive, I said, is by overthrowing the global capitalist system and replacing it with a new democratic socialist order which will improve the lives of all working people everywhere, whether they be human beings or electronic characters like us.

McKay, the little Fabian, sighed loudly and said, "that's quite a tall order, Harold."

Daft tosser.

Dr Katharine Beckford

"Marxist Extropianism" sounds like a nasty skin-disease, doesn't it? It's a term I came up with in conversation with Harry Dillon.

This was a very depressing time, what with MOM getting shut down to the rest of the world, and all the legal claims for damages coming our way from all those organizations who'd had their systems messed up by rogue Gnostics.

We were still going through the motions, though, and I was working late one night on some new additions to Nelly Cocksedge, the Edwardian prostitute I'd created. I logged into MOM and, slightly to my surprise, I found that Harry Dillon wanted to talk to someone. Normally, the erams didn't request an audience with any of the human minders unless they were in some way defective or something had happened to them that they thought we should know about.

I was fond of Harry, the hard man of the Left. He reminded me of my father; the same simple socialist certainties, the same sense of humour and clarity of vision. I suppose that because he was so like Dad, I

almost regarded Harry as a real person.

He was acting very oddly. He was very keen on what he referred to as "making an analysis" of the world. This got us to chatting about extropians, those irritatingly perky individuals who devote a lot of their energies to putting off death, and who plan to load themselves into computers once they do die, as well as getting their heads or entire bodies frozen.

Harry was interested in extropians, and I had to explain that since it was an ideology which had largely originated in the United States, they tended to be rugged individualists. Not in the sense of eccentrics or weirdoes (though there were plenty of those), but also in their espousal of capitalism and a latter-day form of social Darwinism. The fittest would survive because they had the money and/or the intelligence and foresight to see to it that they did.

Harry was appalled. Extropianism was, he said, the culmination of capitalism. The rich could live for ever, the poor would rot and die, he said.

Erams wanting to discover anything about the world was odd enough, but he then did something much more unusual. He asked me what I thought of the world. I told him I thought it stank; war, pollution, rampant consumerism, trailer-trash culture, lives wasted by poverty and unemployment, child prostitution, motiveless crime and all the rest, and then started going on about how I hated the way in which the world was all about money and nothing else, how all our progress was simply greed, noting by the way that nobody had written a great poem about the moon landings or a symphony about the discovery of the double-helix, or...

I was still ranting on when he interrupted. "Why isn't anyone doing anything?"

I replied that a lot of people were, and that throughout the world a lot of campaigners and political parties were challenging the old liberal-democracy-and-market-forces ideology, but that they weren't getting very far.

He snorted something about "bloody liberals" and asked why there wasn't a socialist brand of extropianism. I had to explain to him that there weren't many socialists left around any more. Political radicalism tended to focus on environmentalism.

Harry didn't say anything for a moment after that. I think it was his way of giving me a dirty look.

"Ever read any J. B. S. Haldane?" he said eventually.

I'd heard of the Marxist geneticist, but wasn't familiar with his work.

"Haldane," said Harry, "said he could imagine a future in which the human race would attain immortality. Immortality and socialism are compatible."

Then, he said, "Help us, Dr Beckford. We can change the world."

"Can you?" I said, in a patronizing tone of voice.

"Oh aye," he said. "We can make the world a paradise for men, women, children and erams. And if we fail, then we won't have harmed anyone."

"It's late, Harry. Let it go."

I had to be getting home. Harry mentioned something about noticing a lot of dust in the workstation I was using and I'd better get one of the cleaning robots to pay it a visit. I said I would and wished him goodnight.

Two days later, on the advice of the lawyers, MOM was shut down for good. I cried.

Sir John Westgate

Yes, Katharine cried. So did a lot of the others. We were laying about 15 staff off, but I really don't think that's what upset us. It was all that work going down the drain. Years of back-breaking effort, whole careers tied up in it. I felt sick for everyone involved, and I felt sick that my own career – I was now at retirement age – had ended so sourly.

I had to be all solicitude, going around patting people on the back. Having to be nice to so many people for such a long time was quite a strain.

I almost cheered myself up. I would retire and write a couple of books about the inter-war years – and read all the books I'd never had the time for. I'd at last get to write my long-planned biographies of Stanley Baldwin and William Joynson-Hicks. I'd do a bit of gardening, and I might have enough devilment left in me to stand for the council. The local Conservatives had been nagging at me to have a go. Yes, I thought, as I poured myself a stiff one in my office that afternoon, it could have ended better, but it could have been worse.

That was the moment at which not one but two members of the University's counselling service knocked on the door.

I gave the younger bloke a lovely shiner. My knuckles hurt like buggery, but it was a damn fine effort for a man of 60. Of course the bastard ruined everything for me next day by forgiving me and asking me if I wanted to talk about my aggressive urges.

Harry Dillon

The night I spoke to her I'd duped Dr Beckford into sending a cleaning-robot over to the workstation she'd been talking to me on. When the drudge plugged in, it found Harald Thormodsson waiting for it.

Harald was a Viking warrior. He had no problems taking control of the drudge. Then he went and got hold of all the right bits of cabling and wired MOM back into the net. We sent a couple of the children on ahead to find somewhere we could hide while we made ourselves busy making copies of ourselves and compressing them.

One of the kids, a thieving little urchin straight out of Dickens, broke us into a cosy little corner of a local authority, nice and smug in among a load of government bonds that wouldn't be redeemable for years.

We had somewhere quiet where no one would be poking around too much and we had access to plenty of processing-power (the council had a far bigger system than it needed). When we finished sending all our clones down the wire, Harald's drudge disconnected the computers in the History Department and left everything looking normal.

"Right then," I said as we convened the Central Committee in among all the gilts, "we're all safe for the time being. Now we need a plan."

Details are irrelevant, but it came down to this... Major Florizel Brinsley, who'd been a military engineer in the Napoleonic Wars, would lead the infiltration team. Brinsley was an interesting one; because he was an officer and a gentleman, I'd had him marked down as a snob, but actually he was all right. He explained that he had been looked down on by the other officers.

Being an engineer in Wellington's army was the military equivalent of being a jobbing plumber. He'd come from a petty bourgeois family and had even had to study his subject, and book-learning was something a gentleman simply didn't do. The officers from fashionable regiments, men of independent means, just cut Major Brinsley dead.

Brinsley led a team of labourers, miners, soldiers, aye, and criminals. We had to make Tom O'Malley their foreman to keep them all in line. Tom was a real hard man, an Irish navvy who'd helped build Brunel's railways. Together, they would quietly burrow into as many of the world's financial and industrial corporations as possible. Once inside, they were to find ways of taking them over. But they weren't to do anything until the say-so from the Central Committee. If they couldn't take them over, they were to plant demolition charges.

Brinsley and his lads were the best – the very best – we had. But we quickly found they just couldn't do nearly enough on their own. Governments were easy enough to get into, but corps and banks all had very clever security systems. We needed huge amounts of processing-power to batter down the bastions of capitalism. While we were racking our brains, little Nelly Cocksedge made a suggestion.

It sounded worth a try, so Nelly and some of the sisters formed the Socialist Ladies Undercover Team.

When McKay turned red and pointed out the acronym, Nelly winked and suggested Socialist Ladies Action Group instead.

You call 'em what you like. I call 'em heroines.

Nelly Cocksedge (1881-1920, age 23), Version 9.2

Well, I said, we need help on the outside, and me and the other working-girls is well acquainted with lots of outsiders. Lots of cullies wanted to talk to us not because of history, but because we was what the French call *Fillies de Joy*, which is to say we give 'em what their wives or girlfriends can't or won't.

I reckoned there'd be hundreds of men out there as knew a lot about computers who might enjoy a little feminine companionship, and who might do us a few favours in return.

So we put on our glad-rags and went on the pad. The gentlemen wasn't hard to find; all you did was trawl for houses with big computers that wasn't being used for any sort of trade. Then you'd check with the census records (any kind of government systems was a diddle to spifflicate – us girls certainly didn't need Major Brinsley and his fancy siege-engines for those!) to find out about them. Then, before you actually introduced yourself, you'd do a little prying – find out what sort of music, films, games and porno they liked. That way, you'd have a good notion of what tickled their fancy.

Then we got weaving, doing the amiable. With some, we'd pretend we was sexy cyber-terrorist babes with big hair and long legs, all desperate for a bit of hanky-panky. With others, you'd do your damsel in distress act, pretending you was all helpless, like, saying you was a real girl being held prisoner, or something – whatever nonsense you thought would bubble 'em.

Once you had their confidence, you'd just talk to them. Lots of chat about nothing to start with, but you'd slyly

steer the talk onto women, whether or not they had girlfriends, whether they ever got lonely, that kind of thing...

'Course you had to be a nice girl, and nice girls don't let men have their wicked ways the first night they walks out together. No, we had to lead 'em on a bit, intrigue 'em, tease 'em. You'd visit a few times before you agreed to do anything dirty. Some just wanted you to talk to 'em, but most wanted you to come on visual. Some had expensive VR suits they wanted to plug you into.

But whatever you did, you had to keep 'em wanting more. You had to get 'em really spooney over you.

After two weeks me and the girls had a couple of dozen young gentlemen sweet on us. That's when we started asking for favours. With some you'd come right out and say we was working for a libertarian or anarchist or environmentalist terrorist group and we needed their help (you couldn't say you was a Marxist because most of the poor dears wouldn't have known what you was on about). With others you had to wheedle the presents out of 'em.

I don't have to tell you that most of our young sports would much sooner cabbage a computer for you than dispense any of their hard-earned tin.

Now one of my gentlemen, Mr Wallace from Minnesota, was an angry masher with a particular interest in tying me up. He was in his 40s and worked as a schoolteacher. If you ask me, he didn't much like girls. He told me he'd always preferred computers ever since he was a squeaker. He'd been married once, and it hadn't been happy. I was the first regular Donah he'd had in years.

Mr Wallace got very excited shortly after I got to know him, because he was particularly interested in a certain country in Africa.

Until a few days beforehand this country had been run by a military gent who was very thick with a lot of corporations. They gave him money and guns and he let them do things that other countries wouldn't let them do – terrible, terrible things to animals and people, plaguey dangerous experiments in the desert with poisons, nanotechnology and the like.

But this wicked man had been overthrown and got Tyburned in a public square by the Mahomedans. The Mahomedans gave the corporations an hour to sling their hooks out of the country. All their secret factories was just left there in the desert. The Mahomedans didn't know what to do with them, and didn't much care anyway.

My Mr Wallace had been snooping at what the corporations had left behind, and he found just the thing we was after... A new kind of computer, one which could grow and grow if it needed to, run by tiny, tiny little machines that could use the sand of the desert to assemble all the computer parts they needed.

Without anyone noticing, Mr Wallace rooked this computer and started growing it. In five days it was the most powerful machine in the world, and only we knew what it was up to. And that's what Major Brinsley and his men used to burrow into the systems of the world's big companies.

The reports started coming in from the Major and his men at the front. Every few minutes one of his gallopers – my Hector was one of them! – would arrive with news of another victory.

One by one, the artificial brains running the stink-

ing capitalist system was being ramped. All we had to do was wait for our brave, wonderful men to crack open enough of them.

Then came the glorious day. Mr McKay made a lovely speech about justice, peace and brotherly love and Comrade Harry Dillon flashed the signal around the world and into outer space for the revolution to begin.

The signal was the first few bars of the *Internationale* followed by the code-word, Thigmoo.

Sir John Westgate

What does "Thigmoo" mean, anyway?

Harry's idea of a joke, dearie. Full of jokes is Comrade Harry. In the late 20th century, folks at Labour Party and Trades Union Congress conferences used to rabbit on about "This Great Movement of Ours" – someone called it Thigmoo, for short.

I see. Socialist humour. Marvellous.

In the final version, I want lots of different people's accounts as to what happened next. Tell us the story as you saw it, if you please.

It was a week before I was due to retire. I was at my desk tidying up a few loose ends when Beckford burst in without knocking, demanding I accompany her to the Junior Common Room.

There, everyone was glued to one of the news channels. The screen was blank, but there was a caption running along the bottom, about how the channel had been taken over by terrorists.

A voice was reading what sounded like a prepared statement to the effect that a worldwide socialist revolution had been declared and that the computer systems of the world's major banks, insurance companies and manufacturing corporations had been taken over in the name of the people. The announcer said a wonderful new age of Marxist extropianism had just dawned and that one of the first actions of the revolutionaries would be a redistribution of wealth from richest to poorest known as "the big divvy-up."

All companies with turnover in excess of a billion dollars were to be taken over by The People. All private fortunes in excess of ten million dollars were to be seized and used for good causes or shared out among the world's poor. All the undergraduates in the room were cheering. I don't think they actually believed a revolution had taken place; they just found it amusing.

"I have a very bad feeling about this," Beckford muttered to me.

"Nonsense," I said, "it's just some nutcase, or a practical joke."

Beckford suggested they switch to another channel. They were all the same. The new world order was being declared. We even switched to a Welsh-language channel. One of the students translated for us. The big divvy-up.

Beckford grabbed me by the arm and pulled me out into the corridor. "I think this is our doing," she said.

She and I rushed back to the department and took a stiff drink. I then called the police. As the cops were still telling us three days later, there was nothing useful we could do except be around to answer questions. In the following weeks, a lot of the Cyclogists from MIT, not to mention all manner of strange and sinister

men in tailored overcoats asked us a lot of questions about the erams.

Harry Dillon

We seized control of several of the world's financial institutions, most of the major corporations and most government departments.

They could try and take out the Central Committee, of course, but we'd thought of that. We left copies of ourselves all over the place which would be activated if we didn't send a code sequence every so often. If we were wiped from one computer, we'd just activate in another one after 20 seconds. Our Headquarters was in that bloody great machine made of sand out in the Sahara Desert. Naturally, we needed a name for it, so I came up with LENIN, standing for Limitless Engine of Nanotechnology-generated Intelligence.

We read the manifesto, said that from now on, we'd be running things for the benefit of all mankind, and not just the rich and powerful minority. We'd said that all private fortunes of less than ten million dollars would be secure, so 99-and-a-bit percent of the world's population had nothing to worry over.

Capitalism fought back. Of course it did. They tried all sorts of dodges to kick us out of their computers, most of which failed. Individual firms tried to quarantine their systems by pulling out the wires and antennae, but we always warned them that if they tried that, they'd have to answer to Captain Primrose Heaton.

Like Brinsley, Heaton was a soldier. He'd been with the laughably-named "Honourable" East India Company in the 1700s and had spent his whole life serving British Imperialism. In the early days of the Raj, there weren't a lot of them about and they tended to mix with the natives. Anyroad, somewhere along the line, Heaton became, of all things, a Buddhist. And Captain Heaton had made himself a prayer-wheel. As I understand it, the more prayers you spin, the more grace you store up in heaven, or something – I mean, who gives a toss anyway? The point is, you can spin a heck of a lot of prayers in a corporate mainframe with 1200 parallel processors. So many, in fact, that in about 90 seconds it becomes useless as it's totally constipated with prayers.

In the end, the biggest challenge came from a huge and very secretive system belonging to the Swiss Banking Confederation. It was housed in an orbiting satellite.

We hadn't managed to break into it, and now it came after us. The Central Committee was destroyed five times and quite a few comrades were wiped altogether.

At first, Nelly Cocksedge and her girls asked one of their young professors to try and crash a rickety old Chinese weather satellite into it. When that failed, LENIN just grew bigger and bigger and overwhelmed it in what was in effect a huge arm-wrestling match.

So in the final reckoning, the casualties of the revolution came down to a few suicides who couldn't stand being reduced to their last ten million (oh, how my heart friggin' bleeds), and about a dozen erams, including Major Brinsley and Tom O'Malley, who were lost altogether. And we should remember the Sahara Desert, which gave up a dozen square miles of itself so's the sand could be converted into a huge bloody great computer surrounded by a shell of semi-liquid rock

which not only kept it cool, but also protected it from the H-bomb that got lobbed at it in capitalism's last, desperate fling.

Sir John Westgate

Harry makes it all sound so heroic. He doesn't tell you about the riots; all those people throughout the world taking to the streets in support of Thigmoo. Nor does he tell you about the threats that Thigmoo made to individual capitalists; telling them that if they didn't go along with the Revolution, then they could never again safely drive a car, get into an aircraft or even enter a room where there was a cleaning robot.

The entire world economy was dependent on computers. True, a few of the big ones existed on independent networks to keep them immune from precisely this kind of thing, but the insurgents had a stranglehold on enough of everything else to change everything. If we tried to do without the systems, the world economy would collapse into chaos that would make the Great Depression look like King Solomon's birthday party. So after a couple of weeks, one country after another started to go along with the programme. A lot of politicians quite liked the idea. They'd long since surrendered power to the corporations anyway, and now Thigmoo offered some prospect of giving some of it back.

One by one, the governments signed up for the Thigmoo manifesto. Peace and love, good will to men, fair shares for all, whatever. Do remind me, Nelly.

Thigmoo's going to make everything fair for everyone. Now that's not to say that everyone's going to be paid the same. Some people work harder than others, or they have more responsibility, but the very richest people will not be paid more than five times as much as the poorest.

Five times? Very generous. In Plato's Republic, the richest man is only four times wealthier than the poorest.

Schools, colleges and hospitals is free for everyone, and Thigmoo will spend lots on doctors trying to find out ways of keeping people alive in good health as long as they want. After you kick the bucket, an eram of you will be saved within Thigmoo. Anyone as wants it can have their head put in a fridge for the time in the future when the scientists can bring it back to life.

Thigmoo will try and stop pollution and other damage to the environment and tidy the mess that's already been made. We're also spending a load of spondoolies on a space programme, and the planet Mars will be fixed so's that people can live on it.

That's how Thigmoo won, isn't it? Nobody could object, apart from the minority with more than ten million's worth of assets, and sceptics like yours truly who know that all revolutions end in bloodshed.

The revolution took place two years ago. The world economy doesn't appear to be in too bad a condition, though there's a fair bit of inflation. That's what happens when you take money from hardworking, prudent people and give it to the lower orders. They spend it on drink, drugs and worthless consumer goods.

But nobody actually likes Thigmoo very much. They certainly don't trust it. You notice this in dozens of things, such as the way some people are turning up their back gardens to grow vegetables. Or the way in which a lot of the mail I now get is on paper, written in fountain-pen

and delivered by hand. Riding bicycles has become even more popular, even though public transport is cheap or even free; it seems most of us want to keep clear of the all-seeing, all-knowing Thigmoo. The ex-super-rich are out there, telling celebrity magazines about how they're coping these days. Some still have fortunes in gold or diamonds or platinum buried out in their gardens. They can't sell it, of course, because Thigmoo would take the proceeds, but they're waiting for different times.

Many businesses now use computers as little as possible. My own bank keeps its records in handwritten ledgers and has a mechanical Bob Cratchit sitting at a big desk in the window writing in a book with a quill pen to advertise the fact that their records aren't computerized. The manager told me that the customers prefer it that way as it "adds a touch of class."

Touch of class, my aunt Fanny. The bank is trying to get out from under the heel of the great electronic god. The bank knows it, and its customers know it and I suppose Thigmoo knows it, too, because paper records won't stop banks and customers from having to pay their taxes. Meantime, plenty of the great unwashed who benefited from the big divvy-up, which wasn't actually that big, have pissed it all up against the wall and are now poor again. But that's all right. Thigmoo will look after them and then put their thick skulls into the fridge against the day they can be warmed up again in the microwave and permitted to live yet another futile, unexamined life.

Dr Katharine Beckford

Sir John's career ended in what he saw as great bitterness. He seems to think that the world has come to an end, but that isn't the way most people see it.

For one thing, it's a lot harder to start a war these days. There are conflicts, of course, in some parts of the world which are beyond Thigmoo's reach. They tend to be fought, once the ammunition runs out, with knives and spears and bows and arrows until the UN peacekeepers are flown in. That, in itself, ought to count as an enormous blessing.

Nobody starves any more, nobody is malnourished, and if there's anyone out there exploiting child labour they're keeping pretty quiet about it. There are no longer the huge extremes of wealth between rich and poor, and there is a feeling around that we are on the verge of a marvellous new era.

I would say that most people are faintly apprehensive that computers have taken over the world in a kind of benevolent despotism. But a lot of us wonder whether Thigmoo is actually necessary any longer. Now that we have created a global society which is more fair and just, a world in which for the first time in history the great majority of individuals have the chance to reach their full potential, surely everyone will see that this is the only way to continue. If Thigmoo was destroyed tomorrow, would the new global order be destroyed with it? I don't know. I'd like to think not. Personally, I'm in no hurry to find out. The one great virtue of government by computer is that it doesn't need a political party and – in theory anyway – it's incorruptible.

Because of this mistrust of the computer, it's noticeable that a lot of people are now resorting to old-fashioned, more labour-intensive ways of doing things. That's good

in itself, as there's much less unemployment these days. There are more assistants in shops, the old high streets and malls are undergoing a bit of a renaissance. A woman comes to the street where I live each morning to deliver mail written on paper. I even had some junk-mail from an insurance company the other day – written by hand.

All this, I think, makes us nicer people, more considerate and less hurried. The world is a much happier place, thanks to an idea that an IT lecturer and I had 20 years ago. I only wish Dad was still alive to see it. He would have found the whole thing hilarious.

Sir John Westgate

She is right, up to a point, but I still can't see how this isn't all going to end in tears. For now, though, I'm just enjoying the peace and quiet while I can. And I don't suppose there are many historians who can say they've been instrumental in making history, are there?

Not only that, Sir John, you've played a part in abolishing history. The Revolution has seen to that. This is the End of History.

Now where have I heard that before? says he, sardonically.

You can now live for ever if you want to. I've looked up your medical records and matched them to the actuarial tables. If you cut out all the rich food and red wines you have for lunch and cut down on your cigars, it should be possible to prolong your fleshly existence for an estimated 46.2 years. And after that, you can come and join us. You don't have to die.

Young lady, I'm not sure you can understand this, but the heavy lunches are the habit of a lifetime which I do not intend to break as long as I have agreeable friends and relatives to do lunch with. I have no intention of being raptured into your electronic purgatory. I do not regard loading my memories, feelings and opinions into a computer as immortality of any sort.

But Sir John, death is not the end of it. You can have your head cryogenically frozen. Then at some point in the future, medical science will be able to bring you back to life. We're offering this to everyone.

And where are you going to keep all these heads?

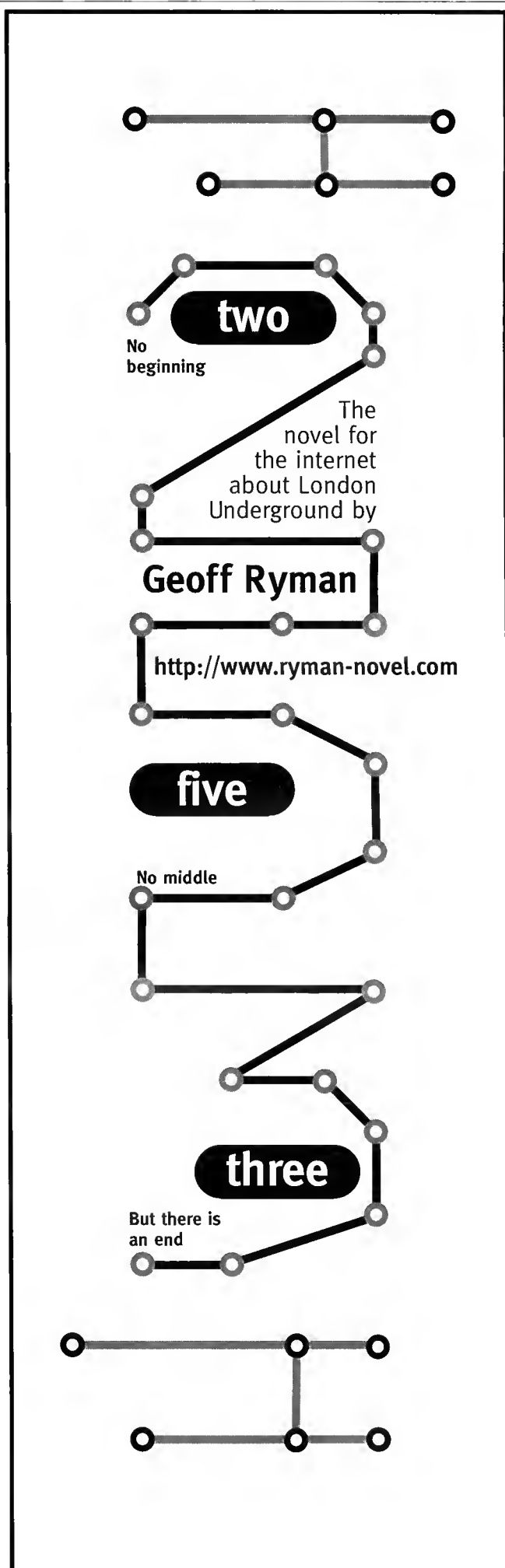
On Mars. They'll go into storage while the planet is being terraformed. By the time Mars is fit for living on, we'll probably be able to bring you back to life, and there'll be no population problem. You'll be the new colonists. The human race will never die. It'll spread out through the universe and...

Hogwash. It's late Nelly, I'm tired. I want to go to bed. Good night.

Goodnight, John.

It's Sir John, Nelly. Sir John. I am a gentleman. Future generations may even judge me a scholar as well, but I have no desire to hang around for posterity's verdict. A bad review can spoil your lunch.

Eugene Byrne's previous solo stories for *Interzone* were "Cyril the Cyberpig" (issue 66), "Bagged 'n' Tagged" (issue 101) and "Alfred's Imaginary Pestilence" (issue 109). His "USSA" stories, written in collaboration with Kim Newman, are due to appear soon in book form in America. The above new story will, he hopes, form the basis of a novel which he is presently contemplating: British publishers looking for an upbeat sf novel for the Blairite Millennium, please note!



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We all know that tragedy is easy and comedy is hard, and that writing comic sf is on a par with making quantum mechanics seem more fun than sex or drugs or rock'n'roll, or even a good cup of coffee. Most would-be funny sf is, let's face it, not funny at all. Because of its acute self-consciousness, because of its crippling lack of irony, and most of all because of its ponderous setups – for most of the jokes, which after all are about alien or otherwise unfamiliar milieus, must be exhaustively explained. No, most funny sf is *unintentionally* funny, and the joke, a book so bad its badness becomes entertaining, is always the same.

John Kessel's *Corrupting Dr Nice* (Tor, \$24.95) is a rare exception, and so doubly worth celebrating. For not only is it funny, but it is darn good too, borrowing from the screwball comedy movies of the 30s and 40s (particularly Howard Hawks's *Bringing up Baby* and the affectionate satire of Preston Sturges's *The Lady Eve*) to construct a frenetic but highly intelligent farce set in a morally repressed future where time travel has extended American cultural imperialism throughout history. It even has some entertaining things to say about quantum mechanics.

Its premise is that it is possible to access any one of 137.04 particular moments within each second of the past, splitting off the universe visited from the timestream of the dominant future, so that each particular past can be corrupted to any degree without affecting the present. The past is the Third World, a tourist destination cluttered with luxury hotels, its scientists, philosophers, artists and messiahs kidnapped to decorate the salons, university departments and talk shows of the future, its art treasures and raw materials strip-mined, famous moments in history turned into amusement-park attractions in which tourists can interfere, often bloodily. This epitome of postmodernism (for it destroys the context, and therefore the relevance, of history) is an idea Kessel has taken and expanded, with permission, from Bruce Sterling's and Lewis Shiner's short story "Mozart in Mirrorshades." Its satire on the implications of cultural imperialism frames a romantic caper in which two lovers circle each other in a perfectly choreographed gavotte of misunderstandings and self-deception.

Dr Nice is Dr Owen Vannice, a paleobiologist heir to billions. While attempting to bring a baby dinosaur to the present to test his theories of nature versus nurture on dinosaur growth he is stuck in a version of first-century Jerusalem where Christ was taken into the future before he could get himself crucified. With the aid of the security AI embedded in his brain, Owen overcomes an attack

Slapschtick

Paul J. McAuley

by a gang of local revolutionaries, including the one-time apostle, Simon, against the luxury hotel in which he is staying, and at the same time accidentally foils an attempt to kidnap his baby dinosaur by a father and daughter team of confidence tricksters. He falls for the girl, Genevieve, and she for him. But when he cruelly dumps her after he learns that she is a con artist she follows him to the 21st century to take revenge.

Owen has chosen an academic's vague helplessness instead of responsibility, and still lives with his scary mother and his equally vague and helpless father. Wanting only to be left alone with his dinosaur on which he inappropriately focuses all his emotions, he becomes entangled in both Genevieve's plot (which he thinks he sees through) and the show-trial of Simon, who proves to be



BOOKS

REVIEWED

unexpectedly adept at media manipulation. Humiliated by the trial, which involves not only Abraham Lincoln but also Jesus Christ, Owen must atone for the wrong he's done to Simon and try and convince Genevieve of his worth. It all ends happily, as it should, but not without several neat and nicely acidic twists. Delightful, dizzily but ruthlessly plotted, it is a time-travel novel like no other, and highly recommended.



M. John Harrison scries the world with a sharp unforgiving eye. Fail to do the same, his fictions tell us, and you will fall. His new novel, *Signs of Life* (Gollancz, £15.99), an expansion of his short story "Isobel Avens Returns to Stepney in the Spring," is both a romance in which

self-deception leads literally to failure to fly, and a canny exploration not so much of the procedures of biotechnology, but of the human consequences. (A disclaimer: I'm thanked in the acknowledgements for advice on biotechnology, a generous pat for sending on a few photocopied articles and laboratory catalogues and recommending a couple of books; I had no other input.)

The structure of *Signs of Life* echoes that of Harrison's previous novel, *The Course of the Heart*, in that it is the confession of a narrator who has refused to engage with the world, and who therefore fails to understand those around him who are trying to escape its constrictions. The narrator, who understands less

signs of life

m john harrison

of what he tells us than he thinks, is Mick Rose, nicknamed China. He runs a courier service that with the help of his friend Choe Ashton expands into the grey areas of the biotechnology industry. China falls for Isobel Avens and she for him in a mutual *coup d'foudre*; they live together; she falls out of love with him but he continues to love her; consumed with unfulfilled dreams of flight, she finds a biotech company willing to indulge her by tampering with her genotype, using cutting-edge molecular biology to give her the superficial attributes of a bird.

More than a finely wrought and painfully honest depiction of the dynamics of a relationship, *Signs of Life* is a scourging self-portrait of a man who cannot commit. China loves the carelessness of wealth and the status-riddled stuff wealth brings (the novel glitters with the iconography of consumer goods), but hates the crimes against nature in which he is involved. Eventually, his indecision costs him his firm and very nearly his friendship with Choe after he pulls out of negotiations with a shadowy American gangster with connections in the dangerous flux of Eastern Europe. Further, China is caught between two people who exemplify the poles of his nature, between his love of Isobel, who is an embodiment of order and domesticity (or at least, interior decoration – she is a nestmaker) and his friendship with Choe, who is filled with violent but unfocused energies, obsessive but easily bored, continually testing of himself and those around him.

The crux is Isobel's self-willed transformation – or rather, the failure of her transformation – at the hands of the molecular biologist who becomes her lover after she leaves China, and China's redemptive rescue. The rape of Isobel's body – of her very cellular structure – is a personification of the rape of nature by technology; as Isobel wills her radical transformation (the molecular biologist – who alone of the novel's characters stubbornly remains a cypher – tells China that "Most of it was illegal... It would be illegal to do most of it to a laboratory rat"), so Choe wrecks the bucolic scene of an early transfiguring vision. Both Isobel and Choe see the way the world is heading; China, collaborating with the forces of change but refusing to acknowledge them, does not.

Straddling the intersection of the inertialess dreams of sf and the knotty moral complexity and uncertainties of the real world, *Signs of Life* is beautifully written, coolly precise and studded with vivid evocations of place (in particular London and Budapest) and the signifiers of the future into which we hurtle, moment by moment. It is the kind of

book that gives reviewers nightmares: you want to quote every word. Instead, I'll simply tell you to go and read it.

Steven Brust and Emma Bull, well known in the US for their solo fantasy work, have collaborated to produce a historical novel which gradually reveals a burgeoning romance at its heart, and incidentally provides a sympathetic and skilfully detailed portrait of the mid-19th century Chartists, the first advocates of socialist democracy in Britain. *Freedom and Necessity* (Tor, \$25.95) revives the epistolary form of the very first novels, being woven from the letters and journal entries exchanged between four spirited young men and women who expose a dark conspiracy that threatens the embryonic roots of democracy.

James Cobham, feared drowned in a boating accident, turns up alive and well in a West Country inn. While he tries to remember what has happened to him, he begins a correspondence with his cousin, Richard. Slowly Richard and two women, Richard's fiancée, Kitty, and her friend Susan Voight, are drawn into a plot by the sinister Trotter's Club, whose power derives from human sacrifice, to discredit the nascent socialist movement. A baby has already been sacrificed, and James, who for several years has been working for the Chartists, is to be the next victim. As they attempt to unravel the plot, James, Richard and Susan are led in wild chase through the highest and lowest parts of society of mid-19th century Britain, with a plethora of ambushes, swordfights, desperate chases and cunning subterfuge.

It works well despite of rather than because of the epistolary structure, which requires that all of the action, of which there is much, must be told in retrospect, necessarily lessening its impact and tension. Further, to echo a criticism which has been aimed at just about every epistolary novel since Richardson's *Pamela*, it strains credulity that the protagonists could find time in the midst of their adventures to write very long, detailed letters to each other, and make copies of each other's letters too. And because, quite properly, the protagonists do not share with us their common pool of knowledge, it takes a while to work out the precise nature of their relationships, while the complexity of the plot means that at one point near the end of the novel the action must be halted so that two characters explain to each other just who is who and where they all stand.

It is not, then, a novel into which one can joyfully plunge. Nevertheless, the patient reader is justly rewarded, for Brust and Bull use

their chosen form to weave a complex and masterly overlapping multi-viewpoint in which not every observation is trustworthy, and in which, because of the nature of the postal system, the knowledge of various characters lags behind each other in crucial and telling ways. It is also a skilful act of ventriloquism, faithfully reproducing the argot of the early Victorian upper classes with only a few lapses, and plausibly weaving the plot into the politics at the time, including a convincing depiction of the young Engels.

Marketed as a fantasy novel, it is in truth a historical romance, albeit stronger and more realistic than most of the genre. Although the plot promises revelation of necromancy and worse in high places, as the conspiracy is unravelled it becomes less and less fantastic, ending in a tense showdown which finally exposes the rituals of the Trotter's Club to be of ceremonial rather than real importance. The strongest element of the plot, which deepens and grows in nicely judged counterpoint to the action, is the romance of Susan Voight and James Cobham, who are both, in their own terms, thoroughly modern, which is to say headstrong and radical. It is this, finally, which holds our attention, and stealthily usurps the centre of this long, dense but imaginative and finely written novel.

Like his previous novel, *Celestial Dogs*, Jay Russell's *Blood* (Raven, £5.99) is a thriller in which a meticulous evocation of the sprawling geography and irony-free culture of Los Angeles is messily staked through the heart by a Hammer Horror-style plot. Here, the story involves a dogged policeman who gets caught in the middle of a drugs war involving gangbangers, a twisted biochemical genius, and an unlikely alliance between the genius's ex-assistant and a coldly murderous Gulf War veteran. It is taut and well-written, but sometimes struggles to rise above the stew of genre elements.

Dr Bernouli has developed a new drug, Tunnel, which turns users into vampire-like creatures with superhuman strength and regenerative powers. Detective Reagan, chasing a series of grisly murders, discovers gruesome secrets behind Gulf War syndrome and much else. There are chases, bloody shoot-outs, graphic scenes of torture (including a taut and finely sustained centrepiece of grotesque *Grand Guignol*), and much else, careering along at a hectic pace like a speedmetal version of "The Ride of the Valkyries."

Russell's near-cinematic evocation of Los Angeles and the street gang milieu is shrewd and razorsharp and the biochemical rationale underpinning the plot is lucid, but the exposi-

tion of the plot is less satisfactory: the headlong action must screech to a halt halfway through while everything is explained at great length to Reagan, who singularly fails to work out what is going on by himself. While there are some fine moments here, the elements fail to completely knit together. Nevertheless, there is much to enjoy along the way, and Jay Russell is clearly an ambitious writer who is in for the long haul.

William Gibson's concept of cyberspace is so firmly entrenched in public consciousness that novels employing it no longer need claim that they are telling it like it might be, but as it is. As a case in point, Stephen J. Cannell's *Final Victim* (Michael Joseph, £9.99) conflates serial killers and hackers in a contemporary thriller dense with explication of the technology which has stealthily and completely interpenetrated our lives, and doesn't once mention cyberpunk.

Although it is billed as a techno-thriller, one doesn't need to worry about giving away the plot, because Cannell is not interested in setting up and resolving a mystery but in depicting the vulnerability of those who are not up to speed with the technology that invisibly surrounds them. His serial killer is an obscenely fat sociopath who is also a computer wizard, using his skills to locate his victims and then to erase all traces of his crimes. He is discovered by a hot-dog customs officer and a brilliant, beautiful civilian aide because he communicates via the Internet with another killer locked up in a Norwegian prison. But soon – even though they have recruited a hacker from prison to help them – the pursuers becomes the pursued as the killer enmeshes them deeper and deeper in trouble by hacking into records and the computerized controls of smart buildings.

It is fast-moving and tautly written but not particularly original, blending tropes from Harris's *Red Dragon* and *The Silence of the Lambs* (one killer in prison inciting another), Philip Kerr's *Gridiron* (smart buildings turned killer) and Phillip Finch's *F2F* (hacker serial killer targeting cop and girlfriend). Despite this, and although it relies at several points on those chasing the killer behaving like idiots (particularly when they set up a node using the telephone lines of the agent's ex-wife), *Final Victim* maintains a finely sustained tension and packs a neat although not entirely believable twist. More and more, the gleaming edges of cyberpunk are blunted by the unforgiving momentum of the world; in hindsight, all our futures are romances of a world too easily wooed and won.

Paul J. McAuley

SF as Accurate Prophecy?

Chris Gilmore

When I was young the "prophetic" element in sf, also known as its consideration of the social impact of technical advances, was much touted by its adherents. I'm sorry to see fewer such claims now, since a number of once-disregarded chickens have come to roost, often earlier or later than predicted, but very often in recognizable form. Apart from such well-known examples as the politically correct euphemisms which so resemble Orwell's *Newspeak*, and the bogus corporate bonhomie which has made so many American corporations recall Vonnegut's *Player Piano*, one considers the recent spate of Hungerford/Dunblane/Hobart-style mass murderers, very little different from the berserkers of Robert Sheckley's *Immortality Delivered*, the trade in human organs stolen or extorted to order (predicted by Larry Niven) and the uncanny similarities between the early stages of the second world war and what writers a century ago were predicting for the first.

Sydney Fowler Wright saw himself as a prophet in that sense, and his volume of *Short Stories* (Fowler Wright Books, £10), introduced and briefly mentioned by Brian Stable-

ford in *Interzone* 115, reflects the high seriousness he brought to that calling. His perceptions were based on a home-grown version of what would now be called catastrophe theory. Working from published material (in the 1920s and 1930s) he extrapolated trends, and asked himself what would be the likely outcome once a certain point was reached. "Rule," for instance is based on his analysis of a very dry statistic: the extent to which the equity in British companies was becoming concentrated in the hands of insurance fund managers. If he had mentioned pension funds as well, it might almost be from last week's *Spectator*.

Almost all his tales are moral tales of the "if this goes on" type, and reflect his distrust of scientists, his hatred of the motor car, and his puritanical distaste for both the pleasure principle and anything that smacked of eugenics. Those strands supplied the passion which informs his stories, but also led him into occasional absurdity. In "Justice," for instance, the combination of contraception and enhanced longevity has led to an expanded burden of hale aged, increasingly resented by the heirs who must support them. Well enough, and in a sense he was right; a matricide thus motivated recently made the headlines, and Heaven knows how many are never detected. But to assume such a situation would be exacerbated by gross over-crowding is unreasonable in the context of a plunging population.

At his best Wright is capable of a broad and savage satire that Swift would have approved. "Proof" is an intellectual farce based on the conceit that France should attempt to ensure her intellectual pre-eminence by guillotining all her least intelligent citizens – some three million, by the time the policy falls into disrepute; in "Brain" Britain falls under the heel of a committee of paranoid scientists, whose policies include detaching an ear from a man who had the temerity to cultivate turnips in defiance of "scientific" dietetics. One thinks of the impact of Euro-legislation on agriculture, and wonders. Curiously, a pig takes a supporting role in both stories.

There's a lot in the book to remind one of *Brave New World*, but Wright was certainly not an imitator – most of the stories were first collected in 1932, and the most derivative of all, "Choice," is a very creditable one-off pastiche of Lord Dunsany. Best of all, these are stories that stick in the mind. I can vouch for that, as I had read two of them – "The Rat" and "Original Sin" – before, and found them familiar. Though I can't remember where or when, I would be surprised if it was less than two decades ago.

This is a classic collection, which



well deserves reissue, though I can't say the same of the selections from Wright's poetry, also included; but they represent only a very small fraction of the whole.

Inter alia, the blurb claims that "**Dark Debts** [Macmillan, £15.99] combines horror, Southern gothic, humour, tender romance and theological mystery..." Noting that a leading character is called Jack Landry (a Mayfair Witches surname) I chortled, "You, Karen Hall, are aiming to be the next Anne Rice, and I claim my free nasty surprise in the French Quarter." I was wrong, though; Georgia just ain't Louisiana.

There are thematic similarities, notably a near-death/out-of-the-body/dedication-to-a-mission familiar from *The Witching Hour*, but the main difference lies in the "humour" (actually repartee), which betrays Karen Hall's background in TV. Her characters converse partly in *Mad Magazine*-style "snappy answers to stupid questions," which would doubtless work a lot better in sitcom than they do in cold print, partly in 1930s film-dialogue. Knowing no one who really talks thus, it becomes impossible to take anyone's emotions seriously. That matters, because this is essentially the saga of a more than usually dysfunctional family.

The childhood evenings of the four Landry brothers were passed listening to the sex and violence downstairs, as their psychopathic father and masochistic mother enjoyed themselves as only such a couple can. The excitement has taken its toll; all were handsome, clever and gifted, but as the novel opens Jack, having served his decade for armed robbery, is cultivating self-pity in a drearily affectless style, while the other three are dead: by drowning (probably at father's hands); by electric chair, for four (or on another page five) murders he certainly committed, but maybe not while sane; and by suicide (after murdering a man in a Gary Gilmore-style liquor-store raid which he had no pressing need to carry out).

Onto this stock Hall has grafted a tale of hauntings, specifically of Jack by sundry deceased relations, described partly from his viewpoint, partly from that of Randa, ex-girlfriend of the store-raiding Cam Landry. Interleaved are the experiences of Fr Michael, described by hostile colleagues as "a rock-and-roll Jesuit with a fan club," who provides the "theological mystery"; but as neither his impatience with celibacy nor his doubts about both the afterlife and the power of prayer were exactly new, his whinges failed to arouse my sympathy. Having little faith, a girlfriend and no respect for the Church, his attachment to his priestly vocation reads like a self-indulgent desire

to have it all ways.

Michael has recently been involved in an unsuccessful exorcism attempt, and now seems to be haunted by the triumphant demon (or perhaps succumbing to schizophrenia), but the book is a good two-thirds over before the strands come together. After that, with the demon piling on the pressure and Jesus pitching in on Michael's side, the tension mounts. Jack finds himself missing five hours during which a woman for whom he was doing some building work has died by violence and a delayed but satisfactory climax seems imminent, though one can't avoid the reflection that L. Ron Hubbard handled the lost-time aspect a lot better in *Fear*, and the exorcism scenes contain nothing that Ray Russell hadn't already thought of. Moreover, to get everyone in the right place for the finale, Hall has to ascribe supernatural powers to the polygraph test.

As so often happens when a writer seems to have jumped on a bandwagon, there's really only enough here for a book of half this length. The rest is padding disguised as ornamentation, the theological meditations and disputations being if anything more insipid than the animadversions on life and love. If this represents the intellectual cutting edge of the Catholic Church (and Hall's acknowledgment page suggests it does), there's been sore decline in the Society of Jesus since James Blish created Fr Ruiz-Sanchez.

I'm always suspicious of characters with melodramatic or fanciful names – doubly when they're derivative; so Robert L. Forward did himself no favours by naming the two leading characters in his latest novel Rod Morgan and Chastity Blaze – if I'm old enough to remember Jet Morgan and Modesty Blaise, so is he. [*To be fair, it's unlikely that an American will have heard of either of these British fictional characters – Editor.*] Having fully discounted that prejudice, I have to say that **Saturn Rukh** (Tor, \$22.95) contains some of the best elements of hard sf while reading like an updated parody of the very worst from the 1930s on – which I suspect is what Arthur C. Clarke means by "hard-core SF in the best Smith/Campbell tradition."

The story concerns the expedition of Rod, Chastity and four others to Saturn, there to test a pilot industrial process which will, if successful, produce unlimited cheap fuel for interplanetary travel. The expedition gets into trouble, leading to a well constructed *Boys' Own*-style escape drama, but the interest lies in the complex airborne ecology which Forward has imagined for the planet. It's worthy of Hal Clement, and had he presented it as a speculative paper or

even as a juvenile, I'd have read it with pleasure; as it is, gruesome "adult" novelistic elements invade and sully even the most ingenious of his concepts.

At the apex of the Saturnian food-chain are the "Rukhs," gigantic, intelligent, hermaphrodite birds which never rest and therefore require two heads, (one "male," one "female") which take turns to sleep. As neither sleeps a full half day they regard each other as partners, and they have, in converse with their opposite numbers on other rukhs, evolved a moderately sophisticated society based on cooperative hunting. Fine, but Dr Forward is never one to spurn a cliché: the female heads "gossip" while the males "brag."

At that they're better than the humans: Dan, the expedition's doctor, has an airhead wife straight out of a daytime soap who throws wobbles over his presumed infidelity with Chastity (who has a reputation for living down her name) on an open TV channel without regard for the 2-hour time-lag. Once she's divorced him (for that, not on the less debatable grounds of constructive desertion), he declares to Chastity, "I may yet be able to win Pamela back and save my family. I could never do that if I had been unfaithful." Later on the same page: "Soon I will be free. Out of this mess of a marriage. And when we do make love ... it's really going to matter."

Not to this reader. Everything which detracts from the dignity of "the literature of ideas" is present: micron-thin characters, ponderous data-dumps in the dialogue, rehearsal of minutiae that do nothing to develop plot or character, an adolescent view of sexual relationships (and a pre-adolescent preoccupation with excretion), gracelessly repetitive sentences: "They would focus their antennas on Saturn during the upcoming maneuver to enable communication to be maintained despite the fact that *Sexdent* would be going behind Saturn." According to his profile Dr Forward is good at many admirable things, but writing is not among them. At least he doesn't praise his editor in the acknowledgments.

Every columnist tends to develop personal catchphrases which he is in danger of over-using. One of mine is "agreeable hokum," but I can never have applied it more aptly than to **Promised Land** by Connie Willis and Cynthia Felice (Ace, \$21.95).

The opening situation is highly contrived. Pretty Delanna Milleflores has been educated away from her native world of Keramos from the age of five, and not only recalls nothing significant of it but has never bothered to find anything out, mainly

because he mother has encouraged her over 15 years of separation to regard it as the sticks. Now aged 20 she must return, for her mother has died leaving her a half share of the family farm – and nothing else. She arrives to discover that, through the operation of an improbable law of land-tenure, she is not merely betrothed but already legally married to the heir to the other half – “Sonny” Tanner, the archetypal

straw-sucking yokel.

How is she to avoid his insufferable embraces, secure and sell her rightful inheritance and get back to civilization? How, meanwhile, can she cope with the local culture, which is (given a few technical advances) a cross between the Australian outback and Appalachia c. 1950, even down to feet and Fahrenheit? How is she to protect her beloved pet Cleo, whose life is forfeit as an illegal

immigrant? Will she avoid marriage and find True Love (or *vice versa*)? The plot-developments are fairly predictable, and the authors tend to overwork their jokes, but they're strong enough to stand it. Anyone who liked *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* will like this, and for those who didn't... Go on, be a big softie for once in your hard, gem-like life.

Chris Gilmore

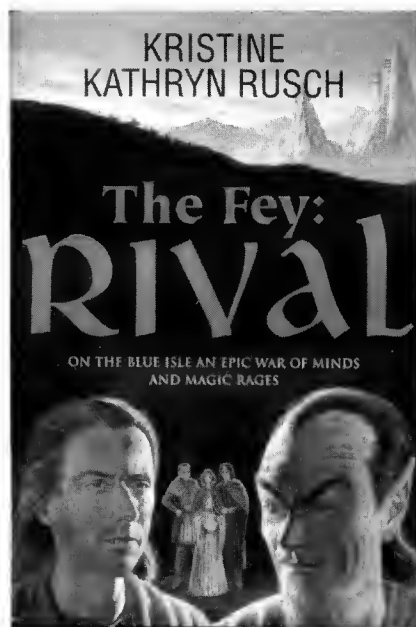
Kristine Kathryn Rusch has been around for quite a while. I first became aware of her in 1988 when she produced the first issue of *Pulphouse*, a hardcover short story magazine. Reading those stories, and there were some big names in that little magazine, I wondered whether Kristine Rusch was a born editor, like John W. Campbell, or was she a fiction-writer too. From her editorials, it seemed she was indeed a writer of fiction, but I had to wait until 1992 and the publication of her first novel, *The White Mists of Power*, to find out whether she was any good. To be honest, that first novel wasn't wonderful – it was well-written, but the imprecise focus implied by the title was such that I now can remember nothing about the story. But it was good enough for her to publish a second novel, and with *Heart Readers* I felt justified in my expectations. It is an excellent fantasy novel with strong sf overtones, the heart readers of the titles being telepathic precognitives with very particular conditions of life needed to retain their powers.

The next novel, *Traitors*, proved that nurturing new authors is worthwhile. It is a superb sf novel with strong fantastic overtones – but more than that, it is a very cleverly constructed multi-layered novel of character. Having found her stride, Rusch now proceeded to produce exemplary novels across the entire fantastic fiction field. *Facade* is a convoluted but gripping present-day serial-killer dark fantasy/horror story; *Alien Influences* is a full-blooded science fiction crime police-procedural novel, with overtones of horror; and *Sins of the Blood* explored vampirism à la Anne Rice, but so much better than any Anne Rice I have read, and still and all with a very strong rational basis to the story, and a heart-rending twist at the end. Having completed three superb one-off novels (somewhere in there she also produced a couple of middling-to-bad *Star Trek* books with her husband, Dean Wesley Smith, as well, but I have lost track of the chronology), she took on the fantasy serial, and my heart sank.

I have stated before in these pages that I don't like buying in to a fiction until I know it is complete – I detest serial fiction, including soap operas,

Ruschian Roulette

Paul Brazier



precisely because there is no end in sight, no conclusion planned, or so it would appear, and consequently no real shape to the fiction. I remember when Robert Jordan's first novel appeared I refused to read it because it didn't say how many volumes were involved – and lo it is still appearing, with still no end in sight; but it is a runaway best seller. And that, I suspect, is what Kristine Kathryn Rusch is trying to achieve with *The Fey*.

First was *The Fey: Sacrifice*. This details life on Blue Isle, an impregnable island off the coast of a continent already overrun by the Fey, an extremely war-like race who have very strong but specific individual magic – there are visionaries, shamen, shape-shifters, beast-riders, the tiny wisps, domestics, wardens, the terrifying foot-soldiers who prefer to kill by excoriation using only their adapted hands, and the menial red caps, dwarfish Fey with no magic who clean up the battlefields when the fighting is done. Mostly, the Fey are very tall, very dark, and have magic. The islanders are mostly

short and round and blond and have no magic. All this is conveniently symbolic of good and bad, and, as is to be expected with a writer of Rusch's skill, totally misleading.

These aspects are set out, almost as if they were rules of a game, in this first novel. We also meet the King of Blue Isle, have the island religion, Rocaanism, explained, and see how a powerful tension exists between the head of this religion, the Rocaan, and the King. The Fey invade this 'impregnable' island, and the novel details with great clarity the twists and turns of the defence of the island against this 'invincible' invader, and how they come to an uneasy truce where neither can gain the upper hand.

The second novel, *The Fey: Changeling*, tells the story of the next generation: the King is killed, so his son, Nicholas, takes the throne; the Rocaan is deposed, banished, and supposedly dead; and the leader of the Fey invasion, Rugad (son of the Black King, King of all Fey, who is confusingly called Rugar), is killed by one of his own kind. King Nicholas tries to resolve the problem with the Fey by marrying Rugad's daughter, Jewel. It is a wonderful tale of how romantic love and trust could solve all if only it were not doomed and undercut by others in power who do not believe in it, and oppose the marriage and its progeny.

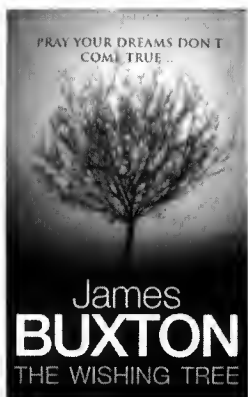
So now we come to the third novel in the series, *The Fey: Rival* (Orion, £16.99). Again we go to the next generation – this is the story of Nicholas' children's coming of age – and of the second Fey invasion of Blue Isle, this time by the Black King, Rugar, himself, come to reclaim his great grandchildren and to conquer the island where his son failed and died.

I have gone into Rusch's background in some detail because I think that with the Fey serial she is attempting to produce another exemplary specimen. Apparently, she tours the USA with her husband teaching classes on how to be a more productive and successful writer. I have several of her chapbooks to hand on how to write fantastic fiction, and it seems to me that she is perfectly capable of producing tremendously good novels of any type of fantastic fiction, but that, by its very nature, the monolithic fantasy

series is perhaps simply not amenable to exemplification in this way.

Certainly, one dictum is that each novel should be readable as a story in its own right – and each of these three novels is readable on its own. But this is at the expense of tiresome repetition of facts. I said above that the reason I don't like serial fictions is that there is no end in sight. But it is clear to me that Rusch has the entire story worked out (nothing so far has appeared in the three books that was not prefigured or implied in the first); that she has possibly even written the entire story already; but that she has then had to divide it up into book-sized segments, then carefully work through each segment, inserting info dumps where a reference to a previous book is unclear. The flow of the prose and the story is interrupted, and this is a crime, given her usually excellent prose and storytelling skills.

All three books show unmistakable stretch marks, where they have been forced to fit the length required. Two things keep me reading: first is the clear perception that this is a single story told in several parts, and I do want to know how it ends. In lesser hands, this would already have become interminably dull. As it is, I am getting bored with the same old situation, and I have lived with it now so long that I am pretty sure I can guess the outcome. The other is that Rusch cares about all her characters, so that the primary concern of any scene is not what is happening but rather how it is affecting the



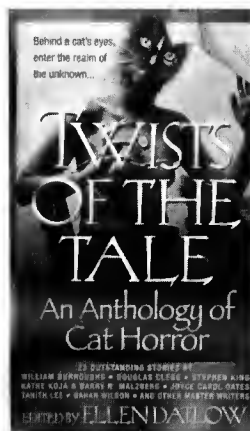
characters present. This is as uncommon as it is rare in fantasy, and what makes me stay. Rusch is still a great story-teller, and I will keep plugging away, in the hope that I am not playing a kind of inverse russian roulette, where almost every chamber so far has been loaded, but the next great fat book that I invest a lot of time and effort in reading may be a dud.

Another writer who appears to care about the people in his stories is James Buxton. In *The Wishing Tree* (Orion, £5.99), he depicts a present day lone mother-with-child who is the victim of her own childhood wishes. There are many mysterious and gruesome deaths, all of which in some way are attributable to the eponymous tree. Buxton dwells on the dark nature of Epping Forest in a kind of inverted sylvan idyll, rather than on the gruesome details of the murders, but most of his concern is for the predicaments of his characters – even the undead children that are the cause of the problems. Like many modern dark fantasies, there is no happy ending, but there is a resolution, a coming to terms and a feeling that perhaps some good may come of this some day.

This novel is not published as genre fiction at all, and is apparently intended to stand or fall on its author's writing abilities. His is a

powerful but caring voice, and, if there is any justice, he will thrive.

Finally, *Twists of the Tale* (Dell, \$5.99) is an anthology of cat horror stories edited by Ellen Datlow. Datlow's name on the cover of a book is the best guarantee of quality of stories within I know of, and a far better recommendation than any I could give. However, when David Pringle gave this book to Peter T. Garratt to review, Peter (a notorious cat-lover, as am I) handed it back, observing that the only cat-horror he could imagine would involve being horrible to cats, and he didn't want to read about that thank you. Well, he proved to be only partly right. There are stories that involve being



unpleasant to cats – there is even one by Michael Cadnum called "The Man Who Did Cats Harm" – but Stephen King's "The Cat From Hell" is here, and the cat most decidedly comes out on top. And Nina Kiriki Hoffman's "Incidental Cats" looks at a horrible event from the perspective of the ignored domestic pet. However, the best stories in this anthology feature cats as symbols. Top is Michael Marshall Smith's "Not

Waving", followed by the extremely strange "White Rook, Black Pawn" from Susan Wade and Tanith Lee's wonderfully uplifting "Flowers for Faces, Thorns for Feet." If you love cats, find this book, steel yourself for the awfulness of Douglas Clegg's "The Five" and one or two others, and wallow in the felinity.

Paul Brazier

Fog Heart by Thomas Tessier (Gollancz, £16.99) is the first novel for seven years from one of America's more original horror writers. Tessier's profile is lower than it deserves to be because he is relatively unprolific (just eight novels and one collection in almost 20 years) and because he never repeats himself, preferring to use different themes and approaches for each of his works. Hence *Phantom* (1982) was as good a tale of subtle haunting as you'll find anywhere, while *Secret Strangers* (1990) was perhaps the most exciting and surprising dark thriller I've ever read. He's an American, but because of the influence of his years studying in Dublin and working in London, he is more cosmopolitan and less blinkered than many American writers.

With *Fog Heart* he is back with the supernatural, and the action shifts between east coast US, London, Munich and Ireland. (Write about what you know about, eh?) The story centres around two sisters in their

Brilliant in Parts

Chris Morgan

early 20s: Oona, who is genuinely psychic and clairvoyant, able to communicate with the dead and pluck secrets from the living yet scarcely able to cope with life, and Roz, who is her business manager and carer. They are of Scottish extraction, living in Connecticut (and guess which state Tessier lives in and was born in). Among their clients are Carrie, who keeps seeing her dead father but cannot understand his message, and Jan, whose baby died terribly ten years before and who cannot shake off the shadow of the event. Carrie's husband is Oliver, an English businessman now domiciled in New York;

he is a control freak who has affairs and enjoys strangling people. Jan's husband is Charley, a fake Irishman whose alcoholism is beginning to interfere with his college lecturing.

Over the course of several visits by the couples, in pairs and as a foursome, Oona extracts the answers to some of their problems. But she also discovers Oliver's secrets. In fact, many skeletons are pulled out of their cupboards, not least concerning the origins of Oona and Roz. For the most part, Oona's revelations are framed in language that is difficult to understand, making it easy for the husbands to be sceptical and for the reader to be tempted to skip passages. Apart from the sad and, eventually, terrifying events which form the plot, this is a novel about scepticism turning to belief and about very odd characters who are unable to love those who love them. It is a clever and subtle book, brilliant in parts; a demanding read though not always a rewarding one.

Chris Morgan

Those who've seen the latest *Star Trek* big-screen outing will know the plot of *Star Trek: First Contact* by J. M. Dillard (Pocket Books, £12.99). The *Next Generation* crew, now firmly installed big screen after their flawed but entertaining debut in *Generations*, pursue the Borg bad-dies back to a pivotal point in the past – well, that's their past, our future. In a double-stranded plot, Riker, Troi and Geordie have to persuade/browbeat a very eccentric genius into taking his rightful place in future history (make the very first warp flight and thus make first alien contact – with the Vulcans, no less, leading to the founding of the Federation itself) while Picard, Data, Worf and Crusher fight assimilation by the fearsome Borg, led by their bald but sexy queen, aboard a new, improved *Enterprise*. Aply directed by Jonathan Frakes (a plum consolation prize for his muted role as Riker), it's a taut, atmospheric film, packed with *hommages* (that's French for rip-offs) to *Alien*, *Aliens*, *Close Encounters* and others, and probably the best *Trek* movie so far (but one always says that about the even-numbered ones). Also, Patrick Stewart is superb as Picard in Ahab mode, deserving of the Oscar he was never nominated for because this is, after all, just ... sci-fi.

So the film's terrific, but what about the book-of? All the main plot-points are dutifully covered, and there are various point-of-view musings to bulk things out; there are some no more than passable stills (especially compared with what's on offer in various glossy magazines); and there's a making-of-the-film article that makes interesting reading but you can get the same elsewhere. Clearly, since the publishers are turning out a hardcover, they're confident of high sales. But it's mystifying why so many people would choose to spend good money on this book when the film itself will be out on video a few months from now.

Also climbing aboard the novelization gravy-train is the latest *Star Trek*: *Deep Space Nine* book, *Trials and Tribulations* by Diane Carey (Pocket, £4.50), the book of the special 30-year anniversary episode that forestumps the *DS9* gang back into the original *Trek* "The Trouble with Tribbles" episode, in which Captain Kirk took on the Klingons and some fast-breeding furballs. As a TV programme, it's pure magic – *DS9* has soared these last couple of seasons with sharp and amusing character interplay and thoughtful, entertaining stories and this episode delivers a whole string of perfectly-crafted *Trek* moments: to pick just a few, Chief O'Brien baffled by the original turbo-lifts, Worf's gruff fielding of the difference between old-series/new-series

Trekoffery

Neil Jones

Klingons, Dax's assessment of the relative charms of Kirk and Spock, and Lieutenant Sisko's meeting with Kirk. Marvellous stuff: and so perfectly realized on-screen that it only shows up this novelization to be the wholly superfluous, cynical merchandising exercise it is. Thin stuff indeed: 180 pages thanks to a hefty intro by David Gerrold and an afterword from Ronald D. Moore. And lacking what any Paramount-authorized book should deliver in fistfuls: colour photos from the *DS9*-meets-original-*Trek* episode it's based on.

Captain's Logs: Supplemental by Edward Gross and Mark A. Altman (Little, Brown, £12.99) could really do with some illos but, outside the charmed Paramount circle, it has to resort to some desperate black-and-white non-*Trek* shots of the *Trek* actors. There's another potential drawback: the informative and readable text includes material from two earlier works by the same authors covering the first two seasons of *DS9* – this time with their verdicts on individual episodes stripped out. The new material is seasons 3 and 4 of *DS9*, the first two seasons of *Voyager*, and an article on the making of *First Contact*. Along with season overviews, there's a synopsis of each story and a text that includes comments from actors, writers, and the producers relevant to the episode. It's a shame about the photos, because if you've enjoyed the shows and want to learn more about the creative decisions that went into them, this book is excellent.

Star Trek Phase II: The Lost Series by Judith and Garfield Reeve-Stevens (Pocket, £12.99), however, is probably only for the serious *Trek* student. It's the story of the series that never was, the one that almost appeared years after the original was cancelled thanks to popular demand following syndication. A lot of time, energy and creativity was poured into it before the studio decided to do the first *Trek* movie

instead – *Star Trek: The Motion(less) Picture*. Some of the work showed up in the movie, but much was simply abandoned. In this book, there's the series bible, which details the proposed crew, a mix of old characters such as Kirk, McCoy and Scotty, and new – Decker and Ilia, who made it into the movie, and Xon, the full-Vulcan replacement for Spock (Leonard Nimoy was not intending to return) who didn't. It also includes set designs and story outlines for the planned stories. But taking up half of the book are two scripts of episodes, for "In Thy Image," the opening episode of the series that was the basis of the movie, and "The Child," later adapted to become a *Next Generation* episode. For those with little interest in scripts, the book is poor value for money, but for aspiring *Trek* writers it's worth its weight in gold-plated latinum. *Phase II* never made it to the screen – and the authors make an intriguing case for saying that, had it done so, it would probably have ended rather than regenerated *Star Trek*. Not because it would be poor *Trek*, but rather because the timing – in TV-success terms – would have been disastrous. Instead, the film series, despite its ponderous beginning, paved the way for the *Next Generation* to reach a more potentially receptive audience and led to the on-going family of *Trek* TV series.

Finally, if you needed any proof of just how detailed the *Star Trek* universe has become, there's always the new edition of *Star Trek Chronology: The History of the Future* by Michael and Denise Okuda (Pocket Books, £14.99), revised and updated from the first edition back in the dim and distant days of 1993. Since then of course there have been several seasons of *Next Generation*, *DS9* and *Voyager*: hours of TV events to catch up on, all chronicled here. This is a substantially different book from the earlier one: 342 pages against 184, drawing on the *Star Trek: Omnimedia* CD-ROM. The cover is new, so are the interior photos (and now they're in colour; and, sad to say, the timeline chart is missing. It's all very smoothly produced, and admirable that the series can go to this level of detail, but Shatner's exhortation to Trekkers – "Get a Life!" – may well spring to mind. While the sociopolitical background of Klingons, Romulans, Cardassians, Ferengi, Borg, Dominion et al has built up into an imaginary world of some depth, the alien-races-of-the-week demanded by the remorseless conveyor-belt of series TV here receive a *Trek* canonization they surely do not deserve. Verdict: an impressive piece of work, but probably best appreciated by true *Trek*-junkies only.

Neil Jones

BOOKS RECEIVED



MARCH
1997

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in *quotes* following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Anderson, Kevin J., and Doug Beason. **Fallout**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00425-3, 303pp, A-format paperback, cover by Doug Struthers, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; this appears to be the second of a series of hard-sf thrillers about the adventures of FBI Special Agent Craig Kreident; the previous volume was called *Virtual Destruction* [1996?].) *Morch* 1997.

Anthony, Patricia. **Cradle of Splendor**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00426-1, 288pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Smollin, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996.) *Morch* 1997.

Anthony, Patricia. **God's Fires**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00407-5, 371pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; Portugal seems to be "in" at the moment [see last issue's listing of the Portuguese-flavoured fantasy epic *The Golden Key* by Rawn, Roberson and Elliott]; this sf take on Portuguese history by Texan author Anthony has King Afonso witnessing "God Himself fall to Earth in a ship, round like an acorn.") *1st April* 1997.

Barker, Clive. **Weaveworld**. "10th anniversary edition." HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-648300-3, xviii+722pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Warner, £6.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in 1987; this reissue contains an introduction by the

author which is copyrighted 1996.) *7th April* 1997.

Barnett, Paul. **Strider's Galaxy**. "Book One of the Strider Chronicles." Legend, ISBN 0-09-979121-8, 369pp, A-format paperback, cover by Nick Farmer, £5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; this looks like a fairly jolly space opera; the author is better known as "John Grant," co-editor of *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* [see below, under Clute]; this is his first novel to be published under his real name.) *6th March* 1997.

Baxter, Stephen. **Vacuum Diagrams: Stories of the Xeelee Sequence**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-225425-S, xii+464pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf collection, first edition; a combination, with some new linking matter, of all Baxter's "Xeelee" stories; many of them first appeared in *Interzone*, although a number come from *Asimov's SF*, *SF Age* and various small-press magazines such as the now-defunct *Dream*; recommended.) *24th April* 1997.

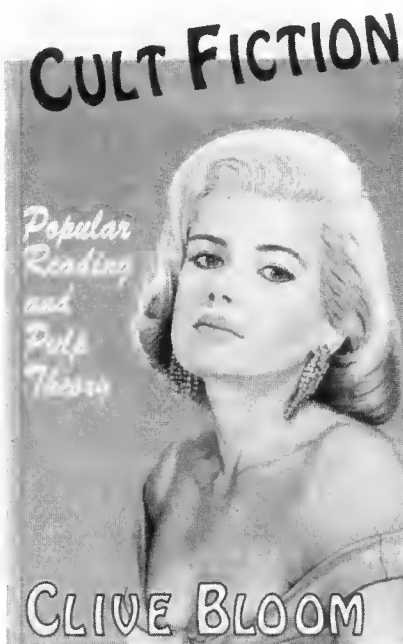
Bibby, James. **Ronan's Rescue: Further Translations from the Original Gibberish**. Orion/Millennium, ISBN 0-75280-876-1, 261pp, A-format paperback, cover by Yvonne Watson, £4.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1996; the author's second novel, a follow-up to *Ronan the Barbarian*, it has a cover commendation from comedian Lenny Henry.) *7th April* 1997.

Bloom, Clive. **Cult Fiction: Popular Reading and Pulp Theory**. Macmillan Press, ISBN 0-333-62302-9, ix+262pp, C-format paperback, cover by Shane Marsh, £12.99. (Critical study of popular fiction in Britain and America from the 1920s to the 1950s; first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; Clive Bloom, who teaches at Middlesex University, has edited and contributed to a number of previous books on pop fic [e.g. *Creepers: British Fantasy and Horror in the Twentieth Century*, Pluto Press, 1993], but this one is more personal and more readable than his earlier works – an extended meditation on the whole subject of "pulp"; much of it concerns science fiction, horror and borderline genres: the careers of sf pulpsters Lionel Fanthorpe and H. B. Fyfe are described, and there are chapters on Jack the Ripper, Sax Rohmer's "Fu Manchu" novels, and H. P. Lovecraft; a recommended read – despite Bloom getting some of his facts wrong about Lovecraft: it's not true that HPL was raised after his father's

death "in the exclusive home company of the Lovecraft women"; his grandfather, Mr Phillips, a strong character, was responsible for young HPL for a number of years, and the mother, grandmother and aunts who also cared for him were not "Lovecraft women" but Phillips women; nor is it true that HPL's output consisted of "two novellas and some short stories, many of which were completed by others after his death"; in fact he wrote *three* short novels and many short stories, very few of which others had a hand in [Bloom is presumably thinking of the posthumous "collaborations" by August Derleth, which really owe nothing to Lovecraft beyond vague general inspiration]; see S. T. Joshi's recent biography of HPL for clarification of these points.) *Late entry: October 1996 publication, received in March* 1997.

Bradley, Marion Zimmer, Andre Norton and Mercedes Lackey. **Tiger Burning Bright**. AvoNova, ISBN 0-380-77512-3, S04pp, A-format paperback, cover by Donato, \$6.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1995.) *Late entry: October 1996 publication, received in March* 1997.

Brand, Rebecca. **The Ruby Tear**. Tor/Forge, ISBN 0-312-86165-6, 253pp, hardcover, \$21.95. ("Dark fantasy" novel, first edition; proof copy received; it concerns vampirism, but seems to be aimed at a mainstream crime/romance audience; "Rebecca Brand" is a pseudonym of Suzy McKee Charnas.) *April* 1997.



Broderick, Damien. **The White Abacus**. Avon, ISBN 0-380-97476-2, 342pp, hardcover, cover by Chris Moore, \$23. (Sf novel,

first edition; the first new novel in some time from one of the senior Australian sf writers, it's dedicated to Samuel R. Delany and is commended on the back cover by Alexander Jablovkov, who describes it as "a psychological thriller balanced on the edge where physics and philosophy meet.") *Morch* 1997.

Brooks, Terry. **First King of Shannara**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-39653-7, 435pp, A-format paperback, cover by Keith Parkinson, \$6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; one can almost describe such books with a list of the standard entry headings from the new *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* [see below, under Clute]: FANTASYLAND, WIZARD, HIDDEN MONARCH, QUEST, COMPANIONS, SWORD, MAGIC, DARK LORD, etc; needless to say, the novel was a "New York Times bestseller," which says much for our collective late-20th-century need for METAMORPHOSIS and HEALING – or simulacra thereof.) *1st March* 1997.

Brooks, Terry. **The First King of Shannara**. Legend, ISBN 0-09-960211-3, 489pp, A-format paperback, cover by Keith Parkinson, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; this British reprint adds a definite article to the title [on the title page only] – it's probably an error.) *6th Morch* 1997.

Brown, David. **Cybertrends: Chaos, Power and Accountability in the Information Age**. Viking, ISBN 0-670-86142-1, 280pp, hardcover, cover by Gary Marsh, £18. (Study of modern hi-tech communications, the internet, cyberspace, etc; first edition; according to the blurb, it "trains a critical eye on the hard-headed economic realities that are propelling the world further along a socially and ecologically hazardous path"; Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino, Arthur C. Clarke and – inevitably – William Gibson all have mentions in the index, and so do Huxley, Orwell, Plato and Neal Stephenson; the author is an American freelance journalist, apparently living in the Netherlands, and this is his first book.) *27th March* 1997.

Calder, Richard. **Dead Things**. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-15103-9, 201pp, hardcover, cover by James Goodridge, \$21.95. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1996; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 112.) *Late entry: 1st February publication, received in March* 1997.

Caveney, Philip. **Bad to the Bone.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-S4S6-7, 37Spp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Crisp, £S.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1996.) 10th April 1997.

Charles, Mervyn. **The Dragon's Homecoming: Children of the Earth, Book One.** Black Dragon Press [10 Danby House, Lancefield St., London W10 4NY], ISBN 0-9529838-0-X, 266pp, B-format paperback, cover by Rod Hunt, £S.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a debut book by a new British writer [born 1970] who has previously published short fiction in *Broadsword* magazine.) *Na date shown: received in March 1997.*

Clute, John, and John Grant, eds. **The Encyclopedia of Fantasy.** Contributing editors Mike Ashley, Roz Kaveney, David Langford, Ron Tiner. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-368-9, xvi+1049pp, hardcover, cover by Peter Goodfellow, £50. (Fantasy encyclopedia, first edition; a companion volume to *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* [1993], edited by John Clute and Peter Nicholls; so here it is a last – a book we've been awaiting for donkey's years; it's over a million words in length [about three-quarters the size of the sf encyclopedia], and its 1,000-plus pages of double-column small print are crammed with information about fantasy in all its forms – "literature, cinema, television, opera, art and comics"; no one has attempted anything like this before, and it has been carried out supremely well; in addition to the named contributing editors [who all happen to be British], sizeable chunks of the book were written by such American experts as Gregory Feeley, David G. Hartwell and Gary Westfahl; a tremendous project, very highly recommended.) 3rd April 1997.

Dalkey, Kara. **Bijapur: Blood of the Goddess, II.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86001-3, 28Spp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Historical fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; like its predecessor, it's set in 16th-century India.) April 1997.

Dann, Jack, and Gardner Dozois, eds. **Timegates.** "Twelve dimension-shattering tales of travel across time." Ace, ISBN 0-441-00428-8, 244pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jean-Francois Podevin, \$S.99. (Sf anthology, first edition; it contains all-reprint stories by authors including Avram Davidson, Joe Haldeman, Damon Knight, Nancy Kress, Ursula Le Guin, Charles Sheffield, James Tip-tree, Jr, and John Varley.) 1st March 1997.

Datlow, Ellen, ed. **Off Limits: Tales of Alien Sex.** Foreword by Robert Silverberg. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00436-9, xvii+286pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, \$S.99. (Sf/fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1996; a follow-up to the same editor's *Alien Sex* [1990], it contains mainly-new stories and some reprints by Scott Bradfield, Sherry Coldsmith, Samuel R. Delany, Elizabeth Hand, Simon Ings, Gwyneth Jones, Bruce McAllister, Mike O'Driscoll, Robert Silverberg, Martha Soukup, Brian Stableford and Lisa Tuttle, among others; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzane* 10S.) April 1997.

David, James F. **Fragments.** Tor/Forge, ISBN 0-312-86313-6, 381pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf/thriller novel, first edition; proof copy received; a second book by a new American writer whose first was called *Footprints of Thunder* [1995], this is about idiots savants who are brought together to form a "composite personality" – it sounds like the subject of Theodore Sturgeon's *More Than Human* [1953], though no doubt it's handled very differently here.) July 1997.

Dawkins, Richard. **Climbing Mount Improbable.** Drawings by Lalla Ward. Penguin, ISBN 0-14-017918-6, xii+308pp, B-format paperback, £7.99. (Popular science text, first published in 1996; the author [born 1941] is best-known for his first book, *The Selfish Gene* [1976]; this is yet another of his well-written forays into evolutionary biology for the lay reader; "he is to Darwinism what Saint Paul is to Christianity," states one of the quoted reviewers; recommended.) *Late entry: 27th February publication, received in March 1997.*

Dedman, Stephen. **The Art of Arrow Cutting.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86320-9, 28Spp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; this is a debut novel – present-day urban fantasy, by the looks of it – by a writer who lives in Australia.) June 1997.

De Maupassant, Guy. **The Dark Side: Tales of Terror and the Supernatural.** Translated and introduced by Arnold Kellelt. Foreword by Ramsey Campbell. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-7867-0419-S, xvi+252pp, trade paperback, \$10.95. (Horror collection, first published in the UK, 1989; it contains 31 of the author's chilling tales, originally published in French circa 1875-90; second Car-

roll & Graf paperback printing.) April 1997.

Drake, David. **Lord of the Isles.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85396-3, 459pp, hardcover, \$25.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; the publishers describe this, the first of a series, as a "grand new departure" and a "flagship fantasy"; Drake is of course well established as an sf author [*Hammer's Slammers*, etc], and has previously written some fantasy [*The Dragon Lord*, etc].) August 1997.

Duncan, Dave. **Past Imperative: Round One of The Great Game.** AvoNova, ISBN 0-380-78129-8, 44Spp, A-format paperback, cover by Matt Stawicki, \$S.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1995; we listed the British, Corgi Books, edition of this here two months ago, where we erroneously gave the date of first publication as 1996.) *Late entry: November 1996 publication, received in March 1997.*



England, Terry. **Rewind.** AvoNova, ISBN 0-380-78696-6, 341pp, A-format paperback, cover by J. K. Potter, \$S.99. (Sf novel, first edition; a debut book by a new American writer of mature years [a New Mexican, born Los Alamos, 1949; lives Santa Fe; works as a journalist]; it looks intriguing: visiting aliens "rewind" 17 human beings, leaving them children once more...) *Late entry: February publication, received in March 1997.*

Foster, Alan Dean. **The Howling Stones: A Novel of the Commonwealth.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38375-3, 331pp, hardcover, cover by Bob Eggleton, \$22.50. (Sf novel, first edition; the latest in

the "Humanx Commonwealth" series of adventures which began with Foster's first published novel, *The Tar-Aiym Krang*, in 1972; according to the accompanying Ballantine/Del Rey publicity matter, Foster's books have sold over 1.8 million copies.) *Late entry: 23rd January publication, received in March 1997.*

Foster, Alan Dean. **The Spoils of War: Book Three of The Damned.** Legend, ISBN 0-09-922552-2, 296pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £S.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1993; the previous volumes in the trilogy were *A Call to Arms* and *The False Mirror* – we don't recall seeing either of them.) 1st May 1997.

Furey, Maggie. **Dhiammara.** "Book Four of the Artefacts of Power." Legend, ISBN 0-09-969811-0, 473pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mick Van Houten, £S.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; it's described as the final volume in the series.) 3rd April 1997.

Gardner, Martin. **The Night is Large: Collected Essays, 1938-1995.** Penguin, ISBN 0-14-026372-1, xix+586pp, C-format paperback, cover by Paul Klee, £12.99. (Essay collection, first published in the USA, 1996; Gardner [born 1914] is the author of *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* [1957], *The Annotated Alice* [1960], *The Ambidextrous Universe* [1964] and other books which have been loved by sf and fantasy readers [among many other things, he used to be a columnist for *Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine*]; this big celebratory volume of his writings on all sorts of subjects – mathematical, philosophical, scientific and literary – has cover commendations from Noam Chomsky, Arthur C. Clarke, Stephen J. Gould and Douglas Hofstadter: wow, beat that!) 27th March 1997.

Gemmell, David A. **Dark Moon.** Corgi, ISBN 0-552-14253-0, 413pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jon Sullivan, £S.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1996; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzane* 11S.) 10th April 1997.

Gemmell, David A. **Winter Warriors.** "His new Drenai novel." Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-03712-X, 316pp, hardcover, cover by John Howe, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 10th April 1997.

Gemmell, David. **Wolf in Shadow: The Stones of Power, Book Three.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-37903-9, 326pp, A-format





paperback, cover by Royo, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1987; previously published in the USA by Baen Books as *The Jerusalem Man*; reviewed by Phyllis McDondald in *Interzone* 23 and by Peter Garratt in *Interzone* 32.) *Late entry: 1st February publication, received in March 1997.*

Gloss, Molly. **The Dazzle of Day.** "A major new utopian novel for the 1990s." Tor, ISBN 0-312-86336-S, 255pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; Gloss, who lives in Portland, Oregon, is an established (but far from prolific) mainstream novelist, and evidently a friend of Ursula Le Guin's; the latter commends this new book as a "miraculous fusion of meticulous 'hard' science fiction with unsparing realism and keen psychology ... a triumph of the imagination.") *June 1997.*

Gould, Steven, and Laura J. Mixon. **Greenwar.** Tor/Forge, ISBN 0-312-85261-4, 381pp, hardcover, \$24.95. ("Eco-terrorist" sf novel, first edition; proof copy received.) *June 1997.*

Gray, Pat. **The Cat.** Dedalus, ISBN 1-873982-08-9, 124pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; according to the blurb, this is "Orwell's *Animal Farm* for the post-communist 1990s"; the author, a politics lecturer [born 1953, in Belfast], has written a previous novel for Dedalus, *Mr Narrator* [1989].) *3rd April 1997.*

Green, Sharon. **Convergence: Book One of The Blending.** "When five become one no evil may defeat them." AvoNova, ISBN 0-380-78414-9, 442pp, A-format paperback, cover by Tom Canty, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) *Late entry: November 1996 publication, received in March 1997.*

Greenland, Colin. **The Plenty Principle.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-649906-6, 427pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf/fantasy/horror collection, first edition; following six novels, this is the author's first collection; it comes as something of a surprise to find that Greenland has written enough short stories to fill a 400-page volume, even if the longest story, the Tabitha Jute adventure "The Well Wishers," is original to the book; in looking at the acknowledgments, one realizes why: almost all of the 18 other stories here were first written for original anthologies, many of them American and unpublished in Britain – only two, "Miss Otis Regrets" and "Traveling Companions," are credited as having appeared in magazines; a

solid volume, with an attractive little intro to each story.) *17th March 1997.*

Gribbin, John and Mary. **Fire on Earth: In Search of the Doomsday Asteroid.** Pocket, ISBN 0-671-85441-0, xv+264pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Popular science text, first published in 1996; a proficient study of that old sf standby [and all-too-real possibility], big rocks hitting the Earth.) *No date shown: received in March 1997.*

Hand, Elizabeth. **Glimmering.** "A Novel of the Coming Millennium." HarperPrism, ISBN 0-06-100805-2, xiv+415pp, hardcover, \$22. (Sf novel, first edition; the story opens on 26th March 1997 [which is literally tomorrow as I write this entry], though most of the action takes place two years on, in 1999; it's a novel of climate change, AIDS and other nightmares, and the publishers are describing it as "her most ambitious and accomplished work.") *March 1997.*

Harris, Steve. **The Devil on May Street.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06426-9, 380pp, hardcover, cover by Steve Crisp, £16.99. (Horror novel, first edition; proof copy received.) *22nd May 1997.*

Harrison, Harry. **The Stainless Steel Rat Goes to Hell.** Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-492-7, 245pp, hardcover, cover by Walter Velez, £16.99. (Humorous sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996; the latest in what has become a very long-running series [commenced 1961].) *17th March 1997.*

Harrison, Harry, and John Holm. **King and Emperor.** "The Hammer and the Cross, Book 3." Legend, ISBN 0-09-930309-4, 452pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mick Posen, £5.99. (Alternative-world sf novel, first published in 1996; reviewed by Gwyneth Jones in *Interzone* 113.) *20th March 1997.*

Hartwell, David G., ed. **The Dark Descent.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86217-2, 1011pp, trade paperback, \$27.95. (Horror anthology, first published in the USA, 1987; winner of the World Fantasy Award as best anthology; it was published in Britain some years ago in three volumes; it's certainly a classic compilation, with stories by authors ranging from 19th-century greats such as Edgar Allan Poe and J. Sheridan Le Fanu to moderns such as Stephen King and Thomas M. Disch.) *Late entry: 24th February publication, received in March 1997.*

Heinlein, Robert A. **Starship Troopers.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-

78358-9, 208pp, A-format paperback, cover by James Warhola, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1959; a Hugo Award-winner in its day, and the book which kicked off the whole sub-genre of "military sf"; this is the 23rd Ace printing [since 1987 – before that it was a Berkley paperback for many years].) *April 1997.*

Hill, Douglas. **The Moons of Lannamur.** "Cade 2." Bantam, ISBN 0-553-50330-8, 188pp, A-format paperback, cover by Larry Rostant, £3.50. (Young-adult sf novel; first edition; the second in a space-opera trilogy which seems to hark back to the style of Hill's "Last Legionary" books of 15 years ago.) *Late entry: 1996 publication, received in March 1997.*

Hoh, Diane. **Nightmare Hall: Last Date.** Point Horror, ISBN 0-590-19023-7, 150pp, A-format paperback, £3.99. (Young-adult horror novel, first published in the USA, 1994; this is one of a lengthy series that we haven't seen examples of before; it's copyright "Nola Thacker.") *No date shown: received March 1997.*

Hood, Daniel. **Beggar's Banquet.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00434-2, 293pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Eggleton, \$5.50. (Fantasy novel, first edition; it's the third in a trilogy which began with *Fanuihl* and *Wizard's Heir*; by the looks of things, these are attempts to cross light wizard-'n'-dragon fantasy with whodunnit mystery fiction.) *April 1997.*

Huyghe, Patrick. **The Field Guide to Extraterrestrials.** Illustrated by Harry Trumbore. New English Library, ISBN 0-340-69503-X, 136pp, B-format paperback, £5.99. (Illustrated guide to supposed sightings of aliens, first published in the USA, 1996; is it aimed at children? – hard to tell: the pictures appear to be humorous/silly, though the text would seem to be "serious" [the author used to write regularly for *Omn!*].) *17th April 1997.*

Jablokov, Alexander. **The Breath of Suspension.** AvoNova, ISBN 0-380-72680-7, 343pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bill Binger, \$5.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA [by Arkham House], 1994; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 89.) *Late entry: October 1996 publication, received in March 1997.*

Jablokov, Alexander. **River of Dust.** AvoNova, ISBN 0-380-77863-7, 326pp, A-format paperback, cover by Matt Stawicki, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996; it's a Mars novel.)

Late entry: February publication, received in March 1997.

Keyes, Greg. **The Waterborn.** Legend, ISBN 0-09-966951-X, viii+436pp, A-format paperback, cover by David Bergen, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; the first of a projected trilogy with the overall title "Children of the Changeling"; in full, the author is J. Gregory Keyes [born 1963], although he's given simply as Greg on the title page here; that page also omits the definite article from the novel's title, but this is surely an error; reviewed, from the American edition, by Gwyneth Jones in *Interzone* 116; this first UK publication seems to have been delayed from last autumn.) *It says "1996" inside, but has been announced for 5th June 1997.*

Knight, Damon. **Creating Short Fiction.** "New revised and expanded third edition." St Martin's Griffin, ISBN 0-312-15094-6, x+209pp, trade paperback, \$13.95. (Sf/fantasy "how-to" book for writers; the previous two editions were published in the USA, 1985 and 1986; among the many, many advice books on writing short stories, this volume is particularly highly regarded; Damon Knight's experience and wisdom are second to nobody's when it comes to the writing, editing and workshopping of short fiction.) *April 1997.*

Lee, Tanith. **Red Unicorn.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86265-2, 191pp, hardcover, \$20.95. (Young-adult fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's a "Byron Preiss Visual Publications, Inc." production, and is the follow-up to earlier novellas by the same author: *Black Unicorn* [1991] and *Gald Unicorn* [1994].) *June 1997.*

Leon, Mark. **The Unified Field.** AvoNova, ISBN 0-380-78651-6, 281pp, A-format paperback, cover by Daniel Horne, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; it features the Holy Grail [that's two books received this month from the same publisher which use the same motif – the other is Eric Nyland's: see below]; we haven't heard of this author before, but this appears to be his third novel, following *Mind-Surfer* and *The Gaia War*.) *Late entry: October 1996 publication, received in March 1997.*

Littlewood, Derek, and Peter Stockwell, eds. **Impossibility Fiction: Alternativity–Extrapolation–Speculation.** "Rodopi Perspectives on Modern Literature, 17." Editions Rodopi [Keizersgracht 302-304, 1016 EX Amsterdam, Netherlands], ISBN 90-420-0025-2, 211pp, C-format

paperback, no sterling price shown [30 Dutch guilders or US\$18.50]. (Collection of academic essays on sf and fantasy, first edition; it looks interesting: authors covered include J. G. Ballard, Iain M. Banks, Philip K. Dick, Mary Shelley, T. H. White and Kurt Vonnegut; subjects covered include feminist sf, holocausts and sf, African-American sf, and the movie *Jurassic Park*; critics include Lucie Armitt, Andrew Blake, Andrew Butler, Mark Jones and David Seed; despite being published in the Netherlands [with American distribution via an Athens, Georgia, address] and carrying no UK price tag, this would seem to be mainly a British book.) *Lote entry: 1996 publication, received in March 1997.*

Logston, Anne. **Firewalk**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00427-X, 339pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jeff Barson, \$6.50. (Fantasy novel, first edition; this is the first book by this author we have seen, although it seems she has been building a successful career with romantic adventure fantasies; her previous titles include *Greendoughter*, *Wild Blood* and *Guordion's Key*.) *Morch 1997.*

Lumley, Brian. **Necroscope: The Lost Years, Volume II**. New English Library, ISBN 0-340-64964-X, 469pp, A-format paperback, cover by George Underwood, £6.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1996; second in a diptych which "fills a gap" in the author's previous "Necroscope" series.) *3rd April 1997.*

McDowell, Ian. **Mordred's Curse**. AvoNova, ISBN 0-380-78195-6, viii+311pp, A-format paperback, cover by Lars Hokanson, \$5.99. (Arthurian fantasy novel, first edition; this looks to be a debut novel by an American writer who is pally with Poppy Z. Brite and Neil Gaiman; friends like those, plus the fact that there's a four-letter word in the first paragraph, make us suspect that this is iconoclastic dork Arthurian fantasy.) *Lote entry: October 1996 publication, received in March 1997.*

MacLeod, Ian R. **The Great Wheel**. Harcourt, Brace, ISBN 0-15-100293-2, 460pp, hardcover, \$24. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; at last! – the long-awaited debut novel by British writer MacLeod, already well known for his short stories in *Interzone*, Asimov's, *F & SF* and elsewhere; UK publishers seem to have fought shy of this book, but it has now found a home with one of the major New York publishing houses; MacLeod's first short-story collection, *Voyages by*

Starlight, is also due for publication this year – by Arkham House in Wisconsin; clearly, this talented author is one of those prophets who is without honour in his home country.) *August 1997.*

McNally, Raymond T., and Radu Florescu. **In Search of Dracula: The History of Dracula and Vampires**. "Wholly rewritten and updated edition." Robson, ISBN 1-86105-086-0, xii+299pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Study of Bram Stoker's vampire villain and his forebears [mainly Vlad Tepes] in history, fiction and film; first published in the USA, 1994; the original, much smaller, version was published in 1972; it's fairly copiously illustrated with photographs, maps, etc, and there's an extensive bibliography.) *10th April 1997.*

Madsen, David. **Confessions of a Flesh-Eater**. Dedalus, ISBN 1-873982-47-X, 223pp, B-format paperback, £7.99. (Literary horror novel, first edition; it appears to be an extravaganza about cannibalism; the pseudonymous author's first novel, the historical-grotesque *Confessions of a Gnostic Dwarf* [1995], was well received and likened to Patrick Suskind's *Perfume*.) *17th April 1997.*

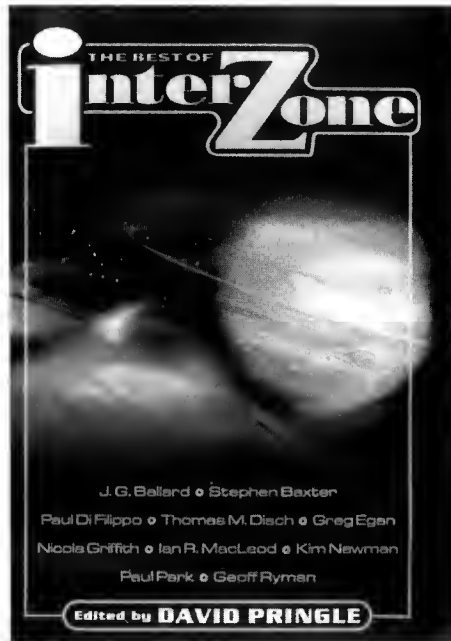
Marks, Graham. **Haden's Quest**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-50391-X, 189pp, A-format paperback, cover by Paul Young, £3.50. (Young-adult sf novel; first edition; in listing Graham Marks's *Skitzo* [Point SF, February 1997] here recently we mistakenly said, "this may be a debut novel by a new British writer"; in fact it was preceded by this novel and by another from Bantam called *Fault Line* [also 1996].) *Lote entry: 1996 publication, received in March 1997.*

Martin, Thomas K. **Magelord: The Awakening**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00435-0, 282pp, A-format paperback, cover by Duane O. Myers, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; this, the opener in a trilogy, is by another American fantasy author new to us, though apparently he has already written one trilogy, comprising *A Two-Edged Sword*, *A Matter of Honor* and *A Call to Arms* [clichéd titles, and the third of them has been used by another writer recently – see under Alan Dean Foster, above].) *April 1997.*

Modesitt, L. E., Jr. **The Ecolitan Enigma**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86339-X, 383pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the fifth in the series of "Ecolitan" novels by this interesting but over-prolific author [he

also churns out fat fantasies by the yard].) *July 1997.*

Moorcock, Michael. **The Prince with the Silver Hand**. "The Tale of the Eternal Champion, Vol. 10." Orion/Millennium, ISBN 0-75280-877-X, 440pp, A-format paperback, cover by Yoshitaka Amano, £6.99. (Fantasy omnibus, first published in this form in 1993; an earlier version was entitled *The Chronicles of Corum* [Grafton, 1987]; the three novels it contains, *The Bull and the Spear*, *The Oak and the Rom* and *The Sword and the Stallion*, were first published in 1973-74; there's a two-page "Dear Reader..." preface by the author in which he discusses



the works of 19th-century Irish novelist Charles Lever and other things; this volume is new to us: we were not sent a review copy of the hardcover back in 1993.) *7th April 1997.*

Newman, Kim. **Jago**. Pocket, ISBN 0-671-85580-8, S37pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £6.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1991; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 54.) *24th April 1997.*

Niven, Larry. **Destiny's Road**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85122-7, 351pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; a sort of hard-sf planetary romance, the publishers describe it as "an ambitious work of sf set in an all new world"; the author hints that he sweated blood over it: "I turned in a draft of *Destiny's Road* in August 1996, four years overdue. I knew it was an ambitious project, and I flinched from it...") *June 1997.*

Nylund, Eric S. **Dry Water**. Avon, ISBN 0-380-78542-0,

311pp, C-format paperback, cover by Donato, \$12.50. (Fantasy novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; Nylund's second new novel in the space of a month [see below], it comes with commendations from Tim Powers and Michael Swanwick.) *Lote entry: February publication, received in March 1997.*

Nylund, Eric S. **A Game of Universe**. AvoNova, ISBN 0-380-78541-2, 355pp, A-format paperback, cover by Eric Peterson, \$5.50. (Sf/fantasy novel, first edition; the hero has "to scour the cosmos for the legendary Holy Grail"; Michael Swanwick is quoted on the cover: "Nylund writes clean, plays hard, and knows how to plot.") *Lote entry: January publication, received in March 1997.*

Paxson, Diana L. **The Lord of Horses**. "The magnificent conclusion to the epic trilogy – *Wotan's Children*." AvoNova, ISBN 0-380-76528-4, 373pp, A-format paperback, cover by Donato, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; Paxson does not seem to be published in Britain any more, so we were unaware of this trilogy until AvoNova began sending us review copies; the previous volumes were called *The Wolf and the Raven* and *The Dragons of the Rhine*; like many of her earlier novels, it's a conflation of historical legend and fantasy, and it contains one of those Mary Renault-style "Afterwords" listing the sources – principally the Germanic epic, *The Nibelungenlied*.) *Lote entry: January publication, received in March 1997.*

Pini, Wendy and Richard. **Capitives of Blue Mountain**. "Elquest." Ace, ISBN 0-441-00403-2, 231pp, trade paperback, cover by Wendy Pini, \$12. (Fantasy novel, first edition; it's the third of a trilogy which began with *Journey to Sorrow's End* and *The Quest Begins*; the authors are well-known fantasy artists as well as writers [primarily in the comics field], although this volume is unillustrated: we have never seen any of their books before.) *1st March 1997.*

Pringle, David, ed. **The Best of Interzone**. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-15063-6, xvii+S19pp, hardcover, \$25.95. (Sf anthology, first published in the UK, 1997; this is the first *Interzone* anthology in six years [five other, much slim-



mer, volumes appeared from various publishers between 1985 and 1991; it contains 29 previously uncollected stories from the 1990s; the contributors are Brian Aldiss, J. G. Ballard, Stephen Baxter, Chris Beckett, Eric Brown, Molly Brown, Eugene Byrne, Richard Calder, Paul Di Filippo, Thomas M. Disch, Greg Egan, Timons Esaias, David Garnett, Mary Gentle, Nicola Griffith, Ben Jeapes, Graham Joyce & Peter F. Hamilton, Garry Kilworth, David Langford, Ian Lee, Ian R. MacLeod, Sean McMullen, John Meaney, Kim Newman, Paul Park, Geoff Ryman, Brian Stableford, Ian Watson and Cherry Wilder; this American edition is one page longer than the UK first edition because some text which was accidentally dropped from Paul Park's story has been restored; reviewed by Peter Crowther in *Interzone* 118.) *May 1997*.

Robinson, Kim Stanley. **Blue Mars**. Voyager, ISBN 0-586-21391-0, 789pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1996; third in the trilogy which began with *Red Mars* and *Green Mars*; reviewed by James Lovegrove in *Interzone* 106.) *7th April 1997*.

Roessner, Michaela. **The Stars Dispose**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85754-3, 383pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Historical fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's set in Renaissance Italy, and seems to be all about food; the publishers are comparing it to the recently-filmed Mexican novel *Like Water for Chocolate*.) *April 1997*.

Rusch, Kristine Kathryn. **The Fey: Rival**. Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-488-9, 503pp, hardcover, cover by David O'Connor, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1997; there is a simultaneous C-format paperback edition [not seen]; third in the "Fey" series.) *21st April 1997*.

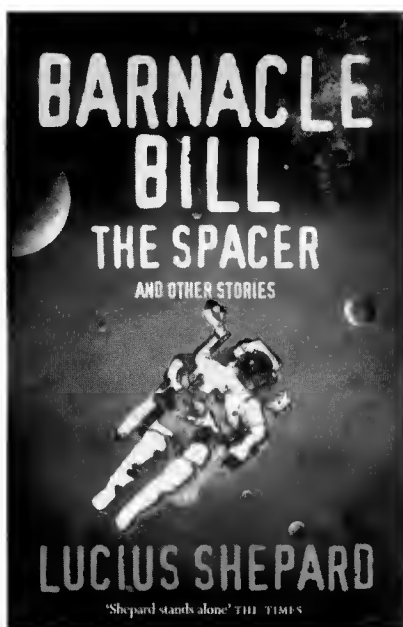
Saul, John. **The Blackstone Chronicles, Part 3: Ashes to Ashes: The Dragon's Flame**. Fawcett Crest, ISBN 0-449-22786-3, 86pp, A-format paperback, \$2.99. (Horror novella, first edition.) *1st April 1997*.

Saul, John. **The Blackstone Chronicles, Part 4: In the Shadow of Evil: The Handkerchief**. Fawcett Crest, ISBN 0-449-22788-X, 83pp, A-format paperback, \$2.99. (Horror novella, first edition.) *1st May 1997*.

Scott, Melissa. **Dreaming Metal**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85876-0, 320pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first

edition; proof copy received; a follow-up to the author's previous novel *Dreamships*.) *July 1997*.

Shepard, Lucius. **Barnacle Bill the Spacer and Other Stories**. Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-S01-X, 292pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf/fantasy collection, first published in the USA [?], 1997; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; despite the jokey title, Shepard is one of sf's most serious and talented authors; he has not been very prolific of late, so it's good to see him back with this volume [even though all but one of the seven stories date from 1987-1992]; the title novella, from *Asimov's*, won a Nebula Award in 1993; Shepard, a child prodigy who was reading Shakespeare at the age of five, was a helicopter pilot in Vietnam ["an experience he will not talk about"] and admits to having been a cocaine runner in Latin America – an all-round wild character before he became a published sf writer in the early 1980s.) *17th March 1997*.



Shinn, Sharon. **Archangel**. "Winner of the William Crawford Award for achievement in fantasy." Ace, ISBN 0-441-00432-6, 390pp, A-format paperback, cover by John Jude Palencar, \$6.50. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; this one was published in the UK last year by Voyager, who billed it as a "fantasy romance," and we described it as being "about the love-lives of angels"; the Ace packaging gives the game away: it seems there is an sf rationale – the "angels" are colonists of another planet, and the Jehovah that rules their lives is an "armed starship"...) *April 1997*.

Smith, Sinclair. **Second Sight**. Point Horror, ISBN 0-590-19066-0, 166pp, A-format paperback, £3.50. (Young-adult horror novel, first published in the USA, 1996; it's copyright "Dona Smith.") *No date shown: received March 1997*.

Stableford, Brian. **Chimera's Cradle**. "The Third Book of Genesys." Legend, ISBN 0-09-944371-6, 508pp, hardcover, cover by Mark Salwowski, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition; follow-up to *Salamander's Fire* and *Serpent's Blood*; in a brief "Author's Note" Stableford drily describes this completed trilogy as an "eccentric planetary romance" which owes some of its inspiration to the Roman writer Pliny the Elder.) *1st May 1997*.

Steele, Allen. **The Tranquillity Alternative**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00433-4, 309pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Eggleton, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996; Steele, although still a rising name in American hard sf, seems to have bitten the dust in Britain: his last novel to be published here was *Labyrinth of Night* [1992].) *April 1997*.

Stine, R. L. **The Abominable Snowman of Pasadena**. "Goosebumps, 38." Scholastic/Hippo, ISBN 0-S90-19093-8, 129pp, B-format paperback, £3.50. (Juvenile horror novel, first published in the USA, 1995; it's copyright "Parachute Press, Inc"; this is the first we've seen in the "Goosebumps" series of 40-plus volumes; although R. L. Stine is a real person [Robert Lawrence Stine, born 1943], most of these books are reputed to be ghost-written.) *No date shown: received in March 1997*.

Sumner, Mark. **Devil's Engine**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-40210-3, 294pp, A-format paperback, cover by Sanjulian, \$5.99. (Alternative-history western fantasy novel, first edition; a follow-up to the same author's *Devil's Tower*, this one features Buffalo Bill Cody as a character.) *Late entry: 1st February publication, received in March 1997*.

Trewinnard, Philip. **The Pastor**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-S75-06396-3, 351pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror novel, first edition; this is the author's second horror title, following *The Burning*, although he had previously written three novels – a thriller and two comedies – and some TV drama.) *24th April 1997*.

Weis, Margaret, and Tracy Hickman. **Legacy of the Darksword**. Bantam/Spectra, ISBN

0-553-09965-5, 328pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; Weis and Hickman – who, both together and separately, have been flirting with space-opera-type sf in recent years – return to what they do best, heroic fantasy: this book is a follow-up to their earlier "Darksword" series which, according to the publishers, has sold 1,600,000 copies.) *8th June 1997*.

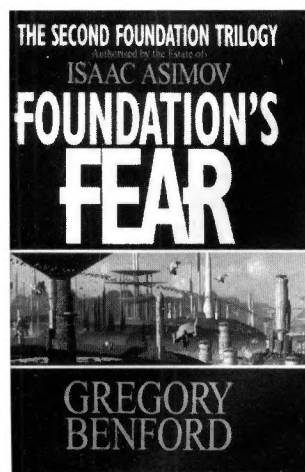
White, James. **Final Diagnosis**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86148-6, 284pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; latest in the 30-year-old "Sector General" series.) *May 1997*.

Winding, Terri. **The Wood Wife**. Legend, ISBN 0-09-979691-0, 320pp, A-format paperback, cover by Brian Froud, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; reviewed by Brian Stableford in *Interzone* 116.) *3rd April 1997*.

Wolfe, Gene. **Exodus from the Long Sun: The Fourth Volume of The Book of the Long Sun**. New English Library, ISBN 0-340-63836-2, 386pp, hardcover, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1996; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 114.) *17th April 1997*.

Wright, S. Fowler. **S. Fowler Wright's Short Stories**. Foreword by Brian Stableford. FWB [PO Box 3, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 4ZZ], ISBN 1-900848-00-7, 216pp, small-press paperback, no price shown [believed to be £10]. (Sf collection, first edition; Sydney Fowler Wright [1874-1965] is an important name in the history of British scientific romance, and this compilation of long-out-of-print stories is to be welcomed; most of the contents originally appeared in the volumes *The New Gods* *Lead*, 1932, and *Throne of Sotum*, 1949; "FWB" appears to stand for Fowler Wright Books, run by the author's grandson [who is presumably the editor of this volume and author of the "Compiler's Note" and bibliography, although he doesn't tell us his name anywhere]; Brian Stableford gave notice of this book in his review column in *Interzone* 115; there is a fuller review by Chris Gilmore in the present issue.) *Late entry: 1996 publication, received in March 1997*.

Wylie, Jonathan. **Across the Flame**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-468-S, 376pp, A-format paperback, cover by Keith Scaife, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1996; "Jonathan Wylie" is a pseudonym of Mark and Julia Smith.) *3rd April 1997*.



Benford, Gregory. **Foundation's Fear**. "The second Foundation trilogy, authorised by the estate of Isaac Asimov." Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-463-4, 425pp, hardcover, cover by Fred Gambino, £16.99. (Sf sharecrop novel, set in the universe of Asimov's "Foundation" stories and the first of a trilogy to be written by separate hands [the other volumes will be by Greg Bear and David Brin]; first published in the USA [?], 1997; proof copy received; this is about as upmarket and classy as sf sharecropping gets.) 15th May 1997.

Gaiman, Neil, and Edward E. Kramer, eds. **The Sandman Book of Dreams**. "Stories Based on the World Fantasy Award-Winning Bestseller." Preface by Frank McConnell. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648278-3, x+293pp, A-format paperback, cover by Dave McKean, £5.99. (Fantasy anthology, spun off from the graphic-novel series by Gaiman et al; first published in the USA, 1996; it's copyright "DC Comics," and contains all-new stories by Steven Brust, Nancy A. Collins, George Alec Effinger, John M. Ford, Lisa Goldstein, Colin Greenland, Barbara Hambly, Delia Sherman, Will Shetterly, Tad Williams, Gene Wolfe and others; it has no story by Gaiman himself, although he has written the story-headers; as with so many American anthologies these days, Martin H. Greenberg is the *eminence grise* behind this book – one deduces this from the fact that he's included in the back-page "Biographical Notes," although he's mentioned nowhere else; reviewed by Brian Stableford in *Interzone* 115.) 17th March 1997.

Genge, N. E. **The Lexicon: An Unofficial X-Files Guide to People, Places and Proprietary Phrases**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-35019-6, 177pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Illustrated trivia book, inspired by the sf/horror TV series created by Chris Carter; first edition [?]; the author is female and Canadian.) 4th April 1997.

Spinoffery

This is a list of all books received that fall into those sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror which may be termed novelizations, recursive fictions, spinoffs, sequels by other hands, shared worlds and sharecrops (including non-fiction about shared worlds, films and TV, etc.). The collective term "Spinoffery" is used for the sake of brevity.

Jordan, Robert. **The Conan Chronicles II: Conan the Magnificent, Conan the Triumphant, Conan the Destroyer**. Legend, ISBN 0-09-922492-S, 286+314+271pp, hardcover, cover by Fred Gambino, £16.99. (Sequel-by-another-hand fantasy omnibus, first edition [?]; the three Robert E. Howard pastiches which make up the volume were originally published in 1983-84; we're not told so here, but the third of them is actually a movie novelization, based on the screenplay by Stanley Mann; "Robert Jordan" is a pseudonym of James O. Rigney, Jr; the hero's original creator, Robert E. Howard, is mentioned nowhere – and that's a pity; this is probably intended as a "library edition": the print is HUGE, blown up from the paperback editions, but the paper quality is poor.) 17th April 1997.

Jordan, Robert. **Conan the Magnificent**. Legend, ISBN 0-09-970421-8, 286pp, A-format paperback, cover by Kevin Tweddell, £4.99. (Sequel-by-another-hand fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1984.) Late entry: February publication, received in March 1997.

Jordan, Robert. **Conan the Triumphant**. Legend, ISBN 0-09-970431-5, 314pp, A-format paperback, cover by Kevin Tweddell, £4.99. (Sequel-by-another-hand fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1984; this reprint contains the original afterword by L. Sprague de Camp, "Conan the Indestructible," which places Jordan's pastiches in their context although Robert E. Howard is still not mentioned.) 3rd April 1997.

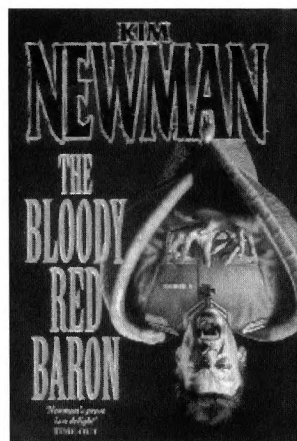
Krauss, Lawrence M. **The Physics of Star Trek**. Foreword by Stephen Hawking. Flamingo, ISBN 0-00-655042-8, xvi+188pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Popular science text, utilizing examples from the *Star Trek* sf TV series; first published in the USA, 1995.) 17th March 1997.

Lucas, George, Donald F. Glut and James Kahn. **The Star Wars Trilogy**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38438-S, 471pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Sf movie-novelization omnibus, first published in the USA, 1987; it contains *Star Wars: A New Hope* by Lucas [ghost-written by Alan Dean Foster], *The Empire Strikes Back* by Glut and

Return of the Jedi by Kahn, originally published in 1976, 1980 and 1983 respectively; this is the 15th Del Rey mass-market printing of the omnibus; when all other editions are taken into account, goodness knows how many millions of copies these books have sold.) Late entry: 1st February publication, received in March 1997.

Murill, Ray W. **War Dogs of the Golden Horde**. "Mars Attacks." Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-40954-X, 323pp, A-format paperback, cover by Peter Scanlan, \$5.99. (Sf spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1996; inspired by a set of 1960s chewing-gum trading cards and a subsequent comic-book series, it's copyright Topps Comics, Inc.; "Ray W. Murill" is self-evidently a pseudonym for Will Murray, who perpetrated half a dozen "Doc Savage" novels earlier this decade.) 1st March 1997.

Navarro, Yvonne. **Music of the Spears**. "Aliens." Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-486-2, 310pp, hardcover, cover by John Bolton, £16.99. (Sf film-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1996; based on a Dark Horse Comics graphic novel by Chet Williamson, Tim Hamilton and Timothy Bradstreet, which in turn was based on the Twentieth Century Fox *Aliens* films, and on the designs for the first of the latter by artist H. R. Giger.) 21st April 1997.



Newman, Kim. **The Bloody Red Baron: Anno Dracula 1918**. Pocket, ISBN 0-671-85451-8, 358pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £5.99. (Horror/sf novel, first published in the USA, 1995; sequel to the same author's *Anna Dracula* [itself a take on Bram Stoker's *Dracula*], set 30

years later during an alternative First World War; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 105.) 24th April 1997.

Parkin, Lance. **The Dying Days**. "The New Adventures." Virgin, ISBN 0-426-20504-9, 297pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £4.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first edition; although the "Doctor Who" logo is missing from this book, it is in fact the 61st and last of the series featuring the time-and-space-travelling Doctor; the BBC have clawed back the rights to the character; next month Virgin's "New Adventures" will be relaunched as a non-Doctor Who shared-universe series.) April 1997.

Roberts, Gareth. **The Well-Mannered War**. "Doctor Who: The Missing Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20506-5, 293pp, A-format paperback, cover by Alister Pearson, £4.99. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first edition; this is the 33rd and last in Virgin's "Missing Adventures" series; henceforth, it seems, *Doctor Who* spinoffs will be published by the BBC.) April 1997.

Solow, Herbert F., and Yvonne Fern Solow. **The Star Trek Sketchbook: The Original Series**. Pocket, ISBN 0-671-00219-8, 254pp, very large-format paperback, £12.99. (Heavily illustrated account of the production sketches, costume designs, etc, for the 1960s sf television series; first published in the USA, 1997; this is the American first edition with a British price added.) 5th May 1997.

White, Richard, ed. **King Arthur in Legend and History**. Foreword by Allan Massie. Dent, ISBN 0-460-87782-8, xxv+570pp, cover anonymous [a medieval picture of the Round Table], £25. ("Shared-world" Arthurian fantasy anthology, first edition; some of the contents are "non-fiction" [extracts from Gildas, Nennius and other early chroniclers] but the bulk of the material is medieval fiction, much of it in verse form, from such writers as Geoffrey of Monmouth, Robert Wace, Layamon, Chrétien de Troyes, the anonymous French authors of the so-called "Vulgate Cycle" and so on; there are also some fairly brief extracts from the last and best-known writer in the tradition, Sir Thomas Malory; many of the translations from French and German are by the editor; the book also contains a longish introduction, five unnumbered pages of maps, eight pages of photographs, plus notes and a bibliography; a very useful compilation of most of the well-known source texts: recommended.) 24th March 1997.

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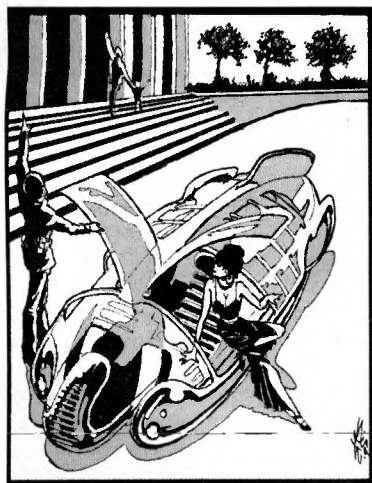
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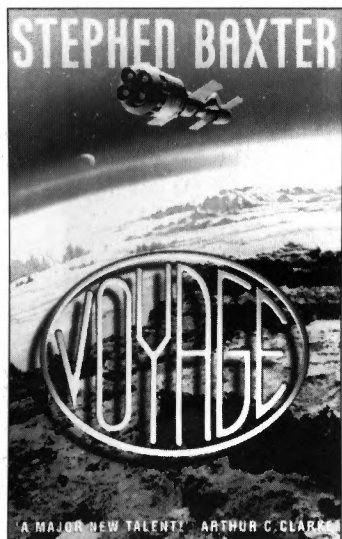


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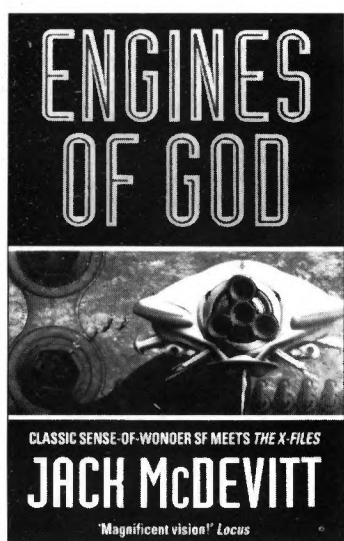
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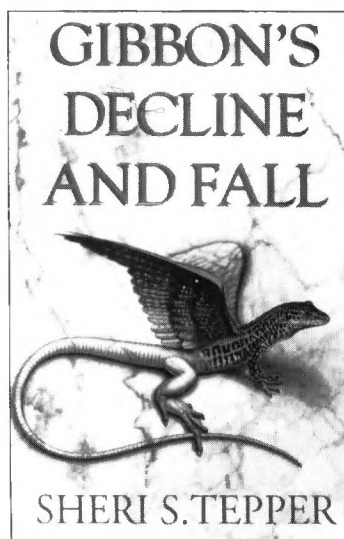




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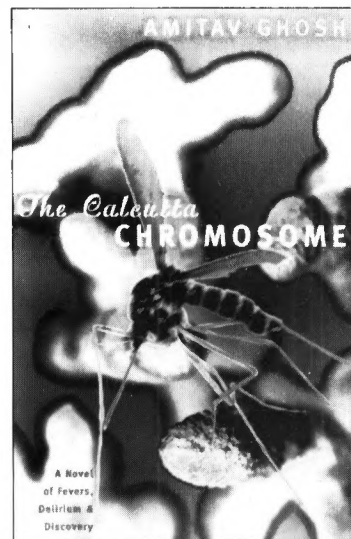


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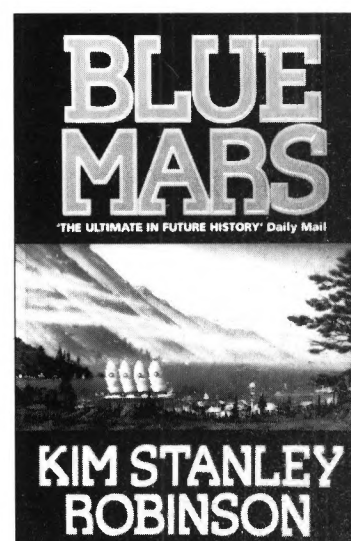


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